LIBRARY
Theological Seminary,
PRINCETON, N. J.
No. Case, 9 A.
BR 45 .B35 1823
Bampton lectures

The Mental Condition necessary to a due Inquiry into Religious Evidence, stated and exemplified,

IN

EIGHT SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR MDCCCXXIII,

At the Lecture founded by

THE LATE REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.

CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY

CHARLES GODDARD, D. D.

ARCHDEACON AND PREBENDARY OF LINCOLN; RECTOR OF ST. JAMES'S, GARLICK-HYTHE; CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO THE KING; AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD GRENVILLE.

WITH

A PREFACE,

AND

NOTES CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY.

OXFORD,

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS FOR THE AUTHOR.

SOLD BY J. PARKER, OXFORD; AND MESSRS. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, AND WATERLOO PLACE, LONDON.

1824.

TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD GRENVILLE,

CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

&c. &c. &c.

AND

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND AND REVEREND

THE HEADS OF COLLEGES

IN THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

THE FOLLOWING SERMONS

ARE

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY

THE BAMPTON LECTURER.

PROPERTY OF PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

1 Corinthians xiv. 20.

IN understanding be men. P. 1.

SERMON II.

1 Peter iii. 15, 16.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear, having a good conscience. P. 27.

SERMON III.

1 John iv. 1.

Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God. P. 47.

SERMON IV.

The same text. P. 79.

SERMON V.

Romans i. 18—21.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. P. 113.

SERMON VI.

The same text. P. 151.

SERMON VII.

MARK iii. 22—26.

And the Scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.

And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?

And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand;

And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand;

And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. P. 193.

SERMON VIII.

JOHN xx. 29.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. P. 235.

SYLLABUS.

SERMON I.

INTRODUCTION. Religious evidence is here contemplated through the medium of the reception it experiences. This ground less occupied—important—seasonable. Moral order of the mind implies ascendancy of intellect and conscience. Grosser instances of this order of the mind being broken in upon, and the functions of the intellect in regard to the method and the conduct of religious proof interfered with, by the inferior qualities of the mind under the forms of infidelity, of superstition, of fanaticism. Lesser degrees of it will be here considered. This interference is direct—indirect. Probable proof presents an especial moral trial; and out of the nature of it arise temptations to an ill-governed mind to such interference. *Direct* interference from within the mind with the METHOD of proof, from sentiment and volition, from fancy and affection; *indirect*, as veiled under pretences to spiritual means of assurance, or under endeavours after demonstration, in regard to the fundamental verities of natural theology and ethics. The *indirect* interference of the inferior qualities of the mind with the intellect in the CONDUCT of religious proof, is discernible in the partial views taken of the subject-matter of the evidences, in the rejection or depreciation of branches or particulars of proof, or in as undue an exaltation of them. And natural and moral truths, in their relations to revealed, afford an extensive field for such partialities and excesses. Survey of them; notice of an incidental relation between physics, singly taken, and the text of Scripture where the same disproportionate views prevail. Plan of the present discourses.

SERMON II.

Direct interference with the intellect from within the mind, where evidence is concerned, and the disturbance given to the foundations and proper character of faith, distinctly considered. The notion that faith and science are the objects of different faculties refuted. Sentiment and volition reduced within their just limits. Proper order of the mind, and supremacy of intellect and conscience, asserted, with reference both to the method of probable proof, and to the conduct of it.

SERMON III.

Indirect interference of lesser qualities of the mind, under the veil of spiritual pretences, examined and condemned on the authority of the passages of Scripture often warped to its support.

SERMON IV.

The same indirect interference detected and exposed by comprehensive views of Scripture facts and truths, of the general divine economy, and of our mental constitution; and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, when exhibited in its just relations to the method and the subject-matter of religious proof, seen to coincide with, and maintain the proper functions of the intellect in regard to both, and specifically to secure an impartial treatment of natural and moral truth in reference to revelation.

SERMON V.

Indirect interference, professedly intellectual, but which, by aiming at a sort of proof that is unattainable, namely, demonstration, diverts the mind from its proper and undivided regard to the probable method. Indirect interference also as to the *conduct* of probable evidence. Undue depression or exaltation of natural and moral truth. In opposition to both extremes, the proper independence of natural theology and ethics deduced from that part of cre-

ation which consists of our mental constitution, of the intellectual and moral capacities of which we are conscious. The subordinate question of the actual discovery of such truths by the human mind reduced to its just place and order. Sufficient to shew, as here is done, from profane antiquity, that the human mind has at no time been absolutely inert in regard to these truths.

SERMON VI.

Tradition and the Jewish Scriptures, in any such acquaintance of the heathen with them as there is ground for crediting, insufficient to account for the light, imperfect as it was, of which the heathen undeniably were in possession. Express authorities of holy writ adduced in support of the views here taken. Natural religion at the same time reduced within its true limits, and defined; independent, but indebted to revelation for the completer views of it which now subsist, and has no tendency to supply the place of this scheme, in any correct apprehension of its proper truths and character.

SERMON VII.

Natural religion, as thus ascertained, as neither unreasonably depressed nor unduly exalted, is next brought into its proper connection with revelation. This connection involves, 1. Preliminary and strictly fundamental points supplied by natural religion. 2. Evidence arising to revelation from natural and moral truth, when united with testimony or with facts. 3. Consonance of scheme and various particulars of revelation with natural and moral notions, whence arise strong presumptions in favour of revelation.

SERMON VIII.

1. Recapitulation, and confirmation by the text of the views which have been taken. 2. The incidental connection of physical truth, separately taken, with the text of Scripture, resumed from the first discourse. 3. The subject-matter of this course of sermons brought home to the

youthful hearer; in respect of the nature of probable proof; the duty and the importance of acquiescing in the method, and of rightly treating the branches and particulars of religious evidence; and in order to this, of THE MORAL GOVERNMENT OF THE MIND, and of EARLY MORAL TRAINING. Objections to such training answered. Conclusion.

EXTRACT

FROM

THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

OF THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON,

CANON OF SALISBURY.

—— " I give and bequeath my Lands and Estates to " the Chancellor, Masters, and Scholars of the University " of Oxford for ever, to have and to hold all and singular " the said Lands or Estates upon trust, and to the intents " and purposes hereinafter mentioned; that is to say, I " will and appoint that the Vice-Chancellor of the Univer- " sity of Oxford for the time being shall take and receive " all the rents, issues, and profits thereof, and (after all " taxes, reparations, and necessary deductions made) that " he pay all the remainder to the endowment of eight Di- " vinity Lecture Sermons, to be established for ever in the " said University, and to be performed in the manner fol- " lowing:

" I direct and appoint, that, upon the first Tuesday in " Easter Term, a Lecturer be yearly chosen by the Heads " of Colleges only, and by no others, in the room adjoin- " ing to the Printing-House, between the hours of ten " in the morning and two in the afternoon, to preach eight " Divinity Lecture Sermons, the year following, at St. " Mary's in Oxford, between the commencement of the " last month in Lent Term, and the end of the third week " in Act Term.

" Also I direct and appoint, that the eight Divinity " Lecture Sermons shall be preached upon either of the " following Subjects—to confirm and establish the Chris- " tian Faith, and to confute all heretics and schismatics " —upon the divine authority of the holy Scriptures— " upon the authority of the writings of the primitive Fa- " thers, as to the faith and practice of the primitive " Church—upon the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Je- " sus Christ—upon the Divinity of the Holy Ghost—upon " the Articles of the Christian Faith, as comprehended in " the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

" Also I direct, that thirty copies of the eight Divi- " nity Lecture Sermons shall be always printed, within two " months after they are preached, and one copy shall " be given to the Chancellor of the University, and one " copy to the Head of every College, and one copy to the " Mayor of the city of Oxford, and one copy to be put into " the Bodleian Library; and the expense of printing them " shall be paid out of the revenue of the Land or Estates " given for establishing the Divinity Lecture Sermons; and " the Preacher shall not be paid, nor be entitled to the re- " venue, before they are printed.

" Also I direct and appoint, that no person shall be qua- " lified to preach the Divinity Lecture Sermons, unless he " hath taken the degree of Master of Arts at least, in " one of the two Universities of Oxford or Cambridge; and " that the same person shall never preach the Divinity Lec- " ture Sermons twice."

PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL

PREFACE.

THE provisions of the will by which the Bampton Lecture has been founded appear well calculated to promote the object which such institutions have in view. Opportunity is given for considerable variety, both in the choice of the subject and in the method of its treatment, while the injunction that the Sermons should be printed, secures to the other regulations their due effect.

From a Lecturer advanced in life, views proportionably mature may reasonably be expected. Long since presumably in possession of well weighed and determinate opinions on the principal topics of theology, on the specific points which the Founder's will has here marked out, not unobservant at the same time of those fluctuations of the human mind, by which divinity, in common with every other branch of knowledge, is affected, he will be prepared to select from the general mass of matter under his view that portion of it which the circumstances of the times may render seasonable in a pertinent sense; not

as falling in with the bias that may be prevalent, but as opposed to, and corrective of it. Of this description are the independent subsistence of moral equally as of natural truth, and the character and the extent of their contributions to the evidences of revelation. Such also is the distinction between those contributions when singly taken, and an internal evidence which they are erroneously supposed to constitute; topics which exemplify, and are here employed to do so, the importance to religious proof of a clear apprehension, wherein the government of the mind consists, and of an habitual assertion of it, as the only human security against a partial treatment of truth or evidence. Hardly less opportune will be thought the reference to direct claims of interference with the understanding from within the mind, such as subvert the mental order, and disqualify the intellect for persevering inquiry: or again, to disturbance not less real from the same quarter, although veiled under pretences to the Spirit.

Aware at the same time over how extensive a field every main point of theology has been permitted to diffuse itself, and how ample therefore must in some cases be his con-

templation, and how express his notice both of past and of subsisting views in order to the making a way to his own conclusions, an experienced discourser may see reason to comprise within the allotted space of eight Sermons a portion of matter and of allusion, which, orally delivered, an ordinary degree of attention will be insufficient to keep pace with, or a moderate exercise of memory may not retain. Here then the requisition to print is in an especial degree appropriate. It affords to all the opportunity of recurring, under a more permanent form, to what had in very different measures been apprehended and remembered, while it leaves to the Lecturer himself, in the selection and disposition of his matter, a proper latitude.

It is by general expressions, for the most part, and with a view to the assertion of the mean where truth resides, that in these discourses the extremes on either side find their condemnation; a method less calculated confessedly to obtain popularity for him who employs it, than specific references to contemporary writers might ensure. But although cases exist where this last expedient would fitly be resorted to, and though the benefits derivable from the controversies to

which it gives occasion are neither problematical nor few, yet since affection, whose interference is always hazardous, and passion, which is as invariably prejudicial, seldom fail to mix themselves in such contentions, whoever is sufficiently impressed with the character of the cause he is maintaining will abstain from needlessly furnishing a plea for the admission of either. Not the least effectual mode of vindicating the claims of evidence or doctrine is, to notice error so far only as may be necessary to a correct and discriminative exhibition of the truths opposed to it.

Certain communications verbal and written with which I was favoured during the delivery of these Sermons, and which conveyed the pleasing impression of minds alive to the most important of all truths, and diligent in the pursuit of them, have suggested to me the addition of notes. By the plea of utility where practical truth is concerned, (and what just theory is there of religious belief or evidence which does not essentially involve it?) the dictates of literary taste may properly be modified; and I have therefore forborne to inquire, whether so brief a composition would otherwise have admitted of the supplement

in question, or what proportion it might correctly hold to the discourses themselves. In regard to its contents, these, where I speak from myself, have for their object the bringing to a common understanding those whose disagreements are rather in words than substance, and the moderating, where differences are real, not at the expence of truth, but in order to its security.

With my own remarks however are interspersed both extracts and references. It might be presumed that on any principal points, on points especially so influential on every other part of religion as the truth, the character, and connection of the divine dispensations, and their relations to the proper constitution of the being for whom they are designed, our principal theologians must have insisted with a force and to an extent commensurate with the claims of such topics on the attention. Accordingly, on the more immediate recourse to those writers, which even with a view to discriminative observation on my own part these notes required, I have been gratified on finding my recollections strengthened and the presumption verified; in perceiving further, what memory had as imperfectly assured me of, that in regard to leading points

I am fully borne out by them. Essential novelty[a], if it be attainable on such subjects, can be so only at the expence of truth; endeavours after it would, on a due acquaintance with our earlier theology, be seen to terminate usually in the revival, not merely of what is old, but of what is disputable; nor need our labours be withheld because no other advantage may arise out of a renewed application to a given topic, than that truths long since ascertained are thus intelligently upheld amid the versatilities of error, or are re-impressed with increased effect on the attention. At the same time, neither the Sermons nor the Notes will be found to indicate an undue recourse to the writings of others, or an implicit reliance on them. Out of a subject fairly submitted afresh to the operations of the understanding, novelty of a subordinate description can hardly fail to arise. Those particular views which have led the mind to regard the recurrence even to a beaten subject as seasonable, will invariably

[a] "The best in each kind (of attacks on revelation and "defences of it) have been long since anticipated, and both "believers and unbelievers must now be content with tra- "versing over again the same beaten track, or they will "take into worse, and but expose their cause instead of "serving it." *Waterland's First Charge.*

suggest to it, when thus interestingly employed, what may elucidate at least, if not instruct; will exhibit traces of the mental character of him who entertains them. The substance of the truths discussed may nevertheless remain unaltered, and be capable of confirmation from standard writers. Then the general moderation of such theologians as I am here contemplating, and their actual forbearance where essentials are not concerned, are equally conspicuous with their precision in fundamentals. The appeals to them, therefore, which here are largely made, while they support and fortify what is advanced in these discourses, will sanction also the temperate spirit in which they have been framed.

Erroneous, in a degree which exceeds all ordinary wandering, is the persuasion, that the continual study of these masters in the science has a tendency to surfeit and oppress the mind, serves but to amass materials by which its energies are encumbered. Its effect, in proportion to the quality of the mental soil, is to nourish, to invigorate, to supply the foundation whence with most advantage the intellect may proceed to the actual putting forth of its proper strength. The dreams

indeed of indolence and self-complacency, the νεωτερικὰς ἐπιθυμίας, at whatever age they may be found subsisting, this study, in proportion as it fortifies the judgment, has a tendency to repress. It would forbid the crude application to such a subject as theology of talents were they as great as fancy represents them; and would supply the grounds of certain distinctions of no small importance to the purposes of evidence. A habit of arguing, which, disjoined from the ability or the courage to encounter or to employ the full force of reason, advances not beyond the outworks of truth; which, instead of exerting itself to untie the knots it meets with, is applied to the single point of dexterously evading them, and is content, by consequence, with such relative and temporary success as the incompetency of the reader or the weakness of antagonists may offer, will not be confounded with the honest, and ardent, and paramount love of the truth itself, or with the principled moderation by which she essentially is characterised. With equal clearness will the boundaries be discerned between the facile exhibition of rhetorical ornament[b], an

[b] "Propter fastidia plurimorum," says St. Austin, "etiam "ipsa sine quibus vivi non potest alimenta condienda "sunt."

habitual recourse to imagination and sentiment, to glittering conceits, pathetic and declamatory harangues, and highly figurative diction, between these, on the one hand, which in the discreetest employment of them can but subserve the purposes of truth already ascertained, and the mental power and the substantial acquirements through which the truth itself is to be established. By habitual acquaintance with authors pre-eminent for compass of thought, for a scholastic acuteness, for close and accurate reasoning, for a thorough insight into the nature on which religion has to operate, for learning both profound and various, for the pursuit of truth even to her remotest recesses, and for as ample and undaunted an assertion of it, extensive, yet discriminative and sober views will unavoidably be generated. If in the result less anxiety should be shewn for the communication of thoughts which travel round the subject of theology, and scarcely touch its surface; if fewer diversions from the points at issue in this science, and fewer liberties in the handling of them, should be ventured on, the restraint will have proved a wholesome one, and the value of what is permitted to see the light will be proportionably augment-

ed. But far from discouraging any trains of thought, or any methods of exhibiting them, by which a vigorous mind may shew itself, and the interests of religious truth can really be promoted, reading of such a description, wherever steadily pursued, will contribute to suggest those views of evidence and doctrine, and that specific treatment of them, which alone are adequate to the combined demands of religious and of moral truth, and alone give ample scope to the powers of the understanding. Minds which such a course of study can oppress, would under any circumstances be incapable of successful effort.

For the references to foreign theologians, no apology can properly be requisite. Those only who are ignorant of the merits of many of this number, or of the importance of an early preparation of the understanding for its appointed trials, will confound them in one indiscriminate sentence of condemnation, or hinder even a student in the science from all acquaintance with them. No doubt, in regard both to the choice of authors and to the use of them, the youthful mind should be not merely exercised, but assisted: and I have referred to none, from whom, in the

qualified sense in which recourse to authority has here been had, still further benefit is not derivable.

It may be proper to state, that the Notes bearing a metaphysical aspect are an extension of those appended to a Sermon preached by me at the Chapel Royal four years ago. Their design, which is to clear the subject of the evidences from some arguments claiming to belong to that science, and to allot to others their just limits, is far more advantageous to the cause of religious proof, than the undistinguishing censures sometimes passed on all application of metaphysics and of synthetic reasoning to the service of religion. Indeed the declamation which on these heads is not unfrequently indulged in, has no resource but its indistinctness. It is confessedly not on reasonings of such a description, that the fundamental religious verities can satisfactorily be rested. One object of the present Discourses is to confirm this point; and it is to little purpose to allege, in favour of endeavours so to rest them, that the faculties of the mind thus obtain their proper exercise, since they are exercised in error, or that the antagonists of revelation here are argued with after their own manner, if the me-

thod be inapplicable and inconclusive. Still metaphysical argument, as in these Discourses will also be maintained, has its uses even in regard to those very truths; gives both extension and precision to them, when otherwise established; may within these limits both discipline the mind itself, and enable it to contend successfully with error. Then an advantage attaching to such argument, not a defect to be urged against it, is, that wherever properly conducted, it furnishes positive and substantial grounds of intellectual humility; satisfies the mind in a sense and measure, not otherwise attainable, of our aspirations after knowledge, transcending any means we have of arriving at it; of the distinct and absolute bounds, which in regard to certain sublimer points, in regard to the methods even of acquiring the portion of truth within our reach, reason concurs with revelation in prescribing; of the appropriateness of the aid from truths communicated expressly, and on authority that is divine. Even then, as the complaint respects the synthetic mode of reasoning in its application to the *higher* subjects of metaphysical science, it can be just only as it is discriminative and qualified; and in a general view, yet further deductions may be made from it. One main part of the duty

of those who are to build up others in the truth, must be to acquaint themselves with whatever is properly introductory to such edification. Now two great lights, distinct, though often blended in their influences, God has given to mankind, to illumine and direct the conscience, to secure the uprightness of belief and practice. And the main question is not how far in the manner of their deriving to us they may have thus been intermixed, with what degree of reflection from antecedent revelation reason may have been assisted in her rule over the state of heathenism, or what clear and steady rays Christianity may subsequently have shed even on truths which the light of reason had succeeded in adumbrating. The true point for determination, and which lies at the foundation of those other inquiries, is the *proper province* of each of these our appointed guides; the province of truths which, however imparted, have an essential relation to the intelligent and moral capacities with which the Deity originally endowed our nature, cannot therefore be wholly unknown, or without application to us, however circumstanced; and the province of positive communications having a subsequent contingency for their basis, which introduce a remedial system, such as hu-

man reason, even though its discoveries had embraced all that heathenism knew, all those illustrations of the truths of natural religion which revelation has supplied, could not be shewn to have in any degree anticipated or contributed to provide; such as even, when vouchsafed, is appreciated in those respects alone, which bring it into relation with natural and moral notions. If this distinction be lost sight of, the confusion originating in a point so fundamental will spread itself through every part of the subject of theology; but the *evidences* of *revelation* especially must suffer: since truths thus insufficiently distinguished will refuse themselves to their just connection. But now, towards the distinction wanted, an acquaintance with the character of the human mind, of the deterioration it betrays, of the specific relations which even as deteriorated it is able to maintain with the several kinds of truth presented to it, is indispensable. Here therefore abstract discussion, though we should forbear to term it metaphysical, allying itself to facts, and proceeding upon them as separately verified, has a proper application to theology, and claims a place. It has accordingly found a distinguished one in the older divinity of the Church of England: with what advan-

tage to the cause of *revelation*, no one surely can desire to be thought ignorant.

In conclusion, though I venture not to indulge a hope, that the approbation which, from the quarters whence I most had wished to receive it, has been afforded to the plan of these Discourses can be extended to its execution, yet even this will be estimated with candour; for to minds whose survey of religion, and of the prevailing views concerning it, is exact and comprehensive, the *difficulty* and the *seasonableness* of a recurrence to the subject of the Evidences will be alike apparent.

PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY.

SERMON I.

1 Cor. xiv. 20.

In understanding be men.

IF it be incorrect to suppose that the proper subjects of theological discussion, even within the limits prescribed by the founder of this Lecture, are exhausted, hardly less mistake is there, in the opposite extreme, of a persuasion, that by the degree of novelty, principally or exclusively considered, the choice of topics to be discussed may fitly be determined. The effect of such errors may be anticipated. In the one case, points to which full justice is thus assumed to have been done, remain in reality insufficiently treated of; in the other, an indefinite search after what is new inclines religious advocates to the adoption of what it had been the discretion of sounder judgments to reject, so it but keep them clear of others' footsteps.

But if, at the present advanced period of religious inquiry, we can remain satisfied with such incidental originality as may arise out of a renewed application to a subject selected on other and more substantial grounds, a due proportion of it will, in this qualified sense, not be wanting, where the choice has been determined by the united considerations of

the importance of the subject itself, and the degree of occasion there is for actual recurrence to it. Singly taken, its importance might be construed to imply, its having already secured a due regard, would thus exclude the question of novelty altogether; but wherever it can be shewn that fundamental principles are theoretically disavowed, or in practice are made light of, there must still be room for further illustration of them; and that "scribe" must indeed be inadequately "instructed," who cannot "bring forth out of his proper and acquired "treasure things both new and old" towards the supplying it.

No part of theology has been more abundantly discussed, as there is none assuredly of deeper interest, than the evidences of religion; and almost equally vain were it to pace again over ground thus repeatedly trodden, or to take a departure from others' labours to go in quest of suitable additions to them. But religious proof may be contemplated either in itself, and in respect of its proper claims to reception: or its character and pretensions may be viewed less directly through the medium of the treatment which they experience, and the causes of it; of the mental condition requisite to a due appreciation of the nature, and to a correct employment of the subject-matter of religious evidence; of the influence which directly or otherwise would interfere with the proper office of the understanding; of the results, lastly, in which such interference is seen to terminate. To these latter views the attention has less often been specifically directed; while, from their importance, combined with the misconceptions

which prevail concerning them, they may fitly be presented anew to a detailed consideration.

Now religion, in that comprehensive sense of the term which is alone commensurate with the proper character of the object, addresses itself indeed to all the powers and qualities of the mind, but not indiscriminately, and to the same extent. Its evidences are manifestly of the province of the intellect; and while this faculty, itself in due relation with conscience, maintains its proper independence in the mind, so as to apply itself without interruption to the discharge of its appointed functions, the interests of religious truth may be regarded as secure. Unhappily, however, instances abound in which an habitual interference of the other mental qualities with the office of the understanding produces the rejection or the perversion of religious proof; nor would it be an easy task to estimate the mischief which has arisen from such interference under the forms of infidelity, of superstition, and of fanaticism.

Out of the unbeliever's hands has been wrested the weapon of an abused reason, with which he took his stand in natural and moral truth, as on a vantage-ground, whence he might the more readily assail the evidences of revelation; and the common and rational basis on which those dispensations must ultimately repose, has received new strength by his discomfiture. The more systematic efforts of infidelity have in consequence, for a considerable time past, been directed into another channel; have been employed in misrepresenting the sense of those records, whose authority it no longer

availed to question. An evil heart of unbelief, the predominance of a corrupt will, or of some other undue influence, may still be traced; but the results are no longer directly cognizable under the head of religious evidence. As introducing themselves under the veil of Scripture-interpretation, they have received ample notice and correction.

Equally are the just purposes of the understanding, in its application to the evidences of religion, controuled by the implicit submission which the Church of Rome exacts to what had primarily no better foundation than the will or fancy of those by whom it was established. The character of infallibility with which the human mind correctly invests every divine communication, ascertained to be such, is transferred, without the authority of reason or of Scripture, to that Church, and to its oral tradition. The very elements of all belief, and the specific grounds on which we admit the miracles of revelation, are taken away by the required surrender of the intellect to what contradicts and to what abuses the evidence of sense; and the presumptions on behalf of revealed truth, arising out of its internal character and its correspondence with natural notions, are converted, in the Romish exhibitions of that character and of those relations, into a positive argument in its disfavour, as unworthy of the source whence revelation claims to be derived, and corruptive of that nature of which a divine communication would intend the moral benefit. If to these characteristics of the papal doctrines it be added, that the systematic policy of the Church of Rome, were it seen to have any thing in common with that of the

founders of Christianity, would have a tendency to account for that early and extensive success which otherwise and by purely human means is altogether inexplicable, there will appear reason for allowing that the mischief which the principles and tenets of popery have a tendency to produce in regard to the evidences of religion is specific and fundamental. All, however, that solid argument, wielded by minds of the greatest natural capacity, could suggest towards obtaining access to the understandings of persons of that persuasion, and bringing home to them the danger accruing to the foundations of our common Christianity from their irrational scheme of subjecting the intellect, has already been employed; and as neither the character of that Church, nor the arguments by which it recommends its tenets, materially alter, the bulwarks of our faith on that side can need no renewal.

The mischief arising to the same important cause of religious belief from the quarter of fanaticism, bears a still graver character. Here the proper operations of the intellect are superseded by the claim to derive assurance both of the substance and the authority of religious truth from immediate and particular revelation; a pretension which, unsupported as it is by external attestations, has a tendency to destroy the proper criterion of a divine interposition. Indeed the degree of prostration of the understanding is in this case so great, as to operate in the way of preservative against whatever would remove it. "The fanatic," as a great prelate[a] has expressed himself, "has no weak side of common sense."

[a] Doctrine of Grace.

It would be premature, however, to conclude that the ascendency of the intellect has no other adversaries than those whom I have now particularized; and that the reception given to religious evidence is a topic which has no present demand on our attention. In degrees short of these abuses of reason, or of this actual controul over it, and on the part of writers whose attachment to the cause of religion is undisputed, the grounds of satisfaction in regard to its truth are exhibited in points of view which a correct application of the intellect to the subject forbids us to admit, and which appeal in fact to the subordinate qualities of the mind rather than to the understanding. It may be questioned even, whether the principle itself of the requisite predominance of the intellect in order to the due reception of evidence be as fully apprehended in theory, as its apparent simplicity might be thought to imply, and as its importance requires. Every one will indeed acknowledge, that when employed on religious proof, the understanding should be free from partiality and prejudice; but that to take any share in the duty of ascertaining the truth of religion, the intellect alone is competent; that even points, which, when contemplated in other lights, and referred to for other purposes, become the fit objects of the subordinate mental qualities, fall entirely, where evidence is concerned, under the dominion of that faculty; these are propositions very insufficiently inculcated as principles, and of which practice therefore may be expected to exhibit the frequent violation. Many a writer on religion must himself demur to them, if the views of evidence which he permits himself to present to others have been distinctly made out to

his own understanding. These last positions nevertheless are plainly deducible from the former; for whence, in reality, but from the interference of the other qualities of the mind with the proper functions of the intellect, arises undue bias of whatever sort, and when did they interfere without creating it? Direct pretences, it is true, on the part of the subordinate mental qualities, although they exist, are comparatively rare; but the indirect and unavowed intervention is yet more prejudicial; not only occurs oftener, but is less easily perceived and detected.

And both from the *species* of proof by which the truth of religion is established, and out of the *process* by which that proof is conducted, arise facilities for creating such disturbances to the intellect, and for giving to them the forms under which they especially present themselves. There is not, perhaps, a feature of the mind which bears stronger traces of the condition whence our nature fell, than the desire entertained (not in early youth, for this is credulous, but) in proportion as the faculties expand themselves, of a *kind* of assurance in regard to the truth of religion, such as probable evidence is not fitted to supply. For that description of truth exists not less than others in an absolute sense, and independently of the particular way by which we arrive at our assurance of it, and the human understanding was designed, had the other qualities of the mind been retained in due subjection, for clearer views in these respects, and more intimate communion with the Father of all lights, than we now enjoy. Analogy, however, is calculated to reduce

our wishes to the level of our condition; and its influence, and the duty of listening to its conclusions, are strengthened by our being enabled to discern a reason of the dependence it is ordered we should have on moral evidence for satisfaction in regard to the truths which most concern us. Once admit the notion of a probatory state, such as the Scriptures in fact announce, such as our position morally viewed exhibits, such as would seem to be indispensable to the establishment of finite virtue, and we perceive it to be reasonable, that even the acts by which the human mind makes its approaches to truths, themselves designed to prove and discipline our nature, should involve a trial; that neither by the character of the proof, nor by its process, the truth of religion should be pressed upon the mind absolutely and irresistibly. And as it is not by arbitrary or merely positive divine appointment, that such paramount verities are confined to this description of evidence, so the intelligent, the proper moral character by which many of the *particulars* of this mode of proof are distinguished, vindicates its appropriateness to those purposes of faith and practice which religion has in view. We thus are called upon to acknowledge the Deity in those natural and moral relations to ourselves, whence arise our primary obligations. And where this the appointed method of proof is exclusively relied on and appropriately followed up; where the requisite pains and integrity have been bestowed on collecting and appreciating the numerous independent particulars of which probable evidence is composed; where these are duly arranged, exhibited in their mutual relations, and brought to bear in their united force upon

the points at issue, this species of proof may be said to differ in character, rather than in weight, from demonstration. The trial to which the mind finds itself subjected, is not whether it shall yield to evidence less fitted on the whole to satisfy it, than that which belongs to science or the evidence of sense; but whether the price, at which alone such satisfaction is attainable, shall be paid or not; namely, a conscientious and undivided attention on the part of the intellect to the appointed *method* of arriving at the assurance of religion being true, and an absolute disregard of whatever plea would interfere with an impartial *conduct* of the proof by the understanding.

An especial trial then is involved in probable evidence. Reason and conscience have ample room for exercise; but the province of the understanding may be interfered with in a degree of which, in demonstrative or in sensible proof, and in regard to truths of far less importance than those of religion and morality, there could not be a question.

And the trial, it is plain, consists of two parts; embraces

I. The nature of the proof by which the truth of religion is ascertained;

II. The proper treatment both of its method and its subject-matter by the understanding;

And entails under each of these heads specific duties.

I. And first is supposed a just appreciation of the character and sufficiency of the method of probable proof; such as may leave no pretext to the subordinate qualities of the mind for inclining the understanding to the adoption of other *media*.

As an instance of *direct* interference with the intellect under this head, such representations are hazarded of the methods by which religious faith may be generated, as tend expressly to withdraw from the understanding its proper part in the production of that compound virtue. Difficult as it might seem to invest in any degree mere suasion or volition with the character of religious belief, to establish a claim on the part of sentiment or will to be the arbiters of truth, yet has this been attempted. Calling into action the moral tendencies of the human mind prematurely if for a mere moral end, altogether mistakenly if as substitutes for intellectual exertion, *sentimental* advocates of the truth of religion have perplexed, instead of developing, the degree of assistance derivable from a qualified and argumentative reference to those tendencies on the part of the understanding; and the more unsparing the ornaments which in such cases have been thrown around the subject of the evidences, the greater the disturbance introduced into the proper character of religious proof by such ill-timed or unappropriate interference. Or a positive bias of the *will* has been insisted on as a requisite security for the due reception of evidence; a notion not less derogatory to the character and weight of the evidences of religion, than to the proper office of the intellect in respect of them. In

the one instance, the several provinces of sentiment, which supplies the moral distinctions, and of reason, which adopts and renders them available to the purposes of truth and evidence, are confounded; in the other, the will is called into action at the expence of the understanding, and discharged from the just dependence on it.

Well, however, would it be for the cause of religious truth, if the subordinate qualities of the mind were limited to direct and manifest interference. In writers not prepared it should seem to advance beyond the outskirts of fanaticism, yet under the veil of indefinite references to the graces of the Holy Spirit, as to an authorized mean of satisfaction in regard to the truth of religion, the ordinary and appointed method of a rational conviction through the customary exercise of the faculties is dispensed with. Indeterminate expressions on a subject to which the human mind is so much alive, have all the effects of positive error; and the notion is encouraged where it is not explicitly conveyed, that even in ordinary periods belief is sometimes immediately, and from a divine source, impressed upon the passive intellect, or that conviction is rendered needless by such infusions of moral grace, as operate on the sentiments and will, without the intervention of the understanding.

Again, even where the exercise afforded to the functions of the intellect might seem to be the greatest, where hopes are held out of a kind of certainty as attainable by that faculty, which probable proof does not pretend to furnish; yet the

tendency even of this extreme is ultimately to discharge the intellect from that part of its probation, which supposes an adherence to moral evidence; to draw off religious inquiry in the first instance from the channel through which alone satisfaction is derivable; and to indispose the intellect to return to it in good earnest, when these fallacious hopes have been disappointed. And most exposed to liberties of this sort is the description of truths which, originating in the wider field of the material and moral world, and presenting by consequence to superficial inquiry a less distinct and definable character, have need to be themselves discriminately made out, before they can be brought to contribute to the evidences for revelation. When, for instance, minds of a vigorous stamp are seen successively to scale in proof of the existence of the Deity the heights of a sublime metaphysic, how easily is the not less regular succession of failures disregarded, amid the general persuasion which such attempts encourage, that truths which lie at the source of all religion, must in reality admit of demonstration. How apt is the imagination to wander in quest of what metaphysical reasoning in any proper application of it is unable to supply, the groundwork of actual knowledge in regard to them; how ready to forget that they have been otherwise and more appropriately established.

A similar remark is applicable to the endeavours to demonstrate morality; and

More generally to obtain the character of demonstration for those high degrees of probability, (the

highest, in fact, of which moral proof is capable,) that are contained in the evidences for revelation.

II. But secondly, the trial involved in the probable method of proof requires a correct and adequate application of this method to the subject-matter of religious evidence; in other words, requires the proper *conduct* of the proof by the understanding.

And here the numerous particulars of which the proof consists, that are to be assembled from various quarters, and which are not enchained in any necessary series or dependence, enlarge the sphere of trial and expose to multiplied temptation, open wide the door to the lesser qualities of the mind, and to the partial and erroneous views attendant on their direct or other inference. An exclusive attachment thus is generated for some one portion of religious proof, which thenceforward is regarded as secure only through the sacrifice of another; whilst this in its turn is from a different quarter insisted on in as absolute a sense, and with an equal disregard of its relation to the general subject-matter of the evidences.

1st. And first, there may be a rejection or depreciation of branches of evidence. This sometimes shelters itself under spiritual pretences, and specifically under the public and express testimonies of the Holy Spirit, which are employed as grounds for undervaluing the contributions of natural and moral truth to revelation.

Or, independently of this pretext, the distinct existence of the truths of natural theology and ethics is denied or is detracted from, and they are confounded, not only as to their discovery in each instance, (a point comparatively unimportant,) but as to their proper character and basis with that distinct species of truths which belongs essentially to revelation. It is not always easy to ascertain where these indiscriminate views commence, whether with our mental constitution itself, or with the proof deducible thence of the existence and moral attributes of the Deity; or lastly, at the point where these truths, and others immediately consequent on them, when themselves independently established, pass as of course into their proper connection with revelation. More intelligibly, such partial notions obtain encouragement where lax conceptions prevail in regard to the importance of the moral order of the mind, and of the due ascendency of the understanding as a preparation for these inquiries, and where the notion of a trial, as involved in the conduct of probable proof, is not distinctly recognised. Under these circumstances the argument from abuse against the use, and the pretext of danger from the application of a faculty so much perverted as reason has indisputably been, to truths which especially exercise and prove it, are readily resorted to; and as fear has nothing in common with a just precaution, but tends on the contrary to defeat the purposes on behalf of which it has been excited, not only, amid indefinite apprehension, are the claims of natural and moral truth, and of right reason, as employed on them with reference to the evidences, rejected,

but the ultimate foundations of revelation itself are undermined by the defective and erroneous lights in which religious proof is thus contemplated. In such cases an alarmed imagination will not allow the understanding to acknowledge, or systematic error engrafted on such fears precludes it from perceiving, that the moral distinctions which the mind of man, in the proper employment of its faculties, elicits, are indications of the character and will of Him who made us capable of thus eliciting them; are tests of so much of the positive divine communications, as consist of truths which, though common to both dispensations, appertain essentially to the moral; that they lie at the foundation of the express divine and human attestations to revealed truth; that they fortify, in a variety of instances, this external evidence, and even impart to it, on some occasions, its principal significancy; that to keep back the understanding therefore from a direct employment on these truths, is not only to deprive it of one of its noblest exercises, and most important applications, to exclude it from one main part of its office in regard to religious proof, and from a principal occasion of its appointed trials, but that it is to aim a mortal blow at the specific evidences of revelation. All this is either not seen or not acted upon, and an independent foundation is denied to the truths in question. The bow which heretofore was too strongly bent on the side of a fitness of things which affected to stand clear in some degree of the Deity himself, has of late years been forced as much the contrary way; and the apparent simplicity of a conviction acquired by means of

positive proof, and of this in the insulated and defective views of it which in such case are alone admissible, is adduced to supersede that more laborious application of the understanding to the evidences of religion, which an adequate notion of these would dictate. Indolence is soothed, and the apprehensions felt from any considerable dependence upon reason are abated, by a forbearing to require that full and discriminative exercise of the intellect, which the complex character of religious proof, and the intimate connection which subsists between its several branches, concurrently enjoin. Hence the existence of the Deity and of his attributes is preferably rested on merely positive grounds, is not referred to its ultimate basis in natural and moral truth, specifically in the nature with which we are endowed by him. Even where the appropriateness of these last foundations is not contested, it still is often supposed rather than asserted; the attention of the inquirer is coldly invited towards it; he has to discover for himself the specific and determinate process by which may suitably be established those primary verities on which a rational assurance of the truth of revelation and the validity of its positive evidences substantially depend. The prevalent bias is plainly towards overlooking the distinction between truths which, through whatever dispensation they may have been communicated, have a proper foundation in our nature, and in the constitution of things around us, and those with which reason has no other direct concern than that of ascertaining their sense and their authority. Thus is revelation deprived of an ultimate support, lest what consti-

tutes in fact a necessary preparative for a competent understanding of its specific evidences should indispose for their reception.

2. But now the licence exhibited in the conduct of probable proof, and in those applications of it which afford an especial trial to the human mind, would be incomplete, unless the natural and moral contributions to the evidences of revelation, which some altogether reject, and others depreciate, were in their turn immoderately insisted on, and an extreme in one direction became a pretext, and in some degree a cause of equal error in the sense opposed to it. And with the same incorrectness as under the former head, though with the contrary design and application, are the offices of the Holy Spirit appealed to, as sanctioning and bearing a part in this second species of abuse to which the conduct of probable proof is subjected. Sometimes indeed, in so far as an habitually vague manner of expression on these topics can be estimated, sometimes it would seem that the very notion of the moral graces of the Spirit is merged in an assumed sufficiency of the internal character of revelation itself to all the purposes of moral influence. But more frequently, an apparent countenance is obtained for an extreme and exclusive regard to the contributions of ethical truth from the especial relation which the moral graces of the Spirit possess with truth of that description.

Farther; for exaggerated views of this truth a plea is derived from the peculiar features which belong to it. As its inherent character connects it at

once with our mental constitution and with the moral parts of holy writ, the support accruing to revelation from verities so congenial to the human mind, and necessarily more or less familiar to it, easily assumes an undue importance; until the inquiry which bore at first an intellectual character, lapses at length into a sentimental one. By degrees those natural and moral relations, magnified through fancy to the mind, are represented as supplying a body of evidence of itself conclusive; and revelation is assumed to derive its principal claims to belief and to reception, from the exemplifications it affords of moral truth, and of the moral character of the revealer. How much the cumulative character in which resides the strength of probable proof must suffer from this perpetual round of error, from the shutting out or the altogether insisting on any single branch, is manifest; and the evil is augmented in this case by the circumstance of the branch selected in order to exclusive reliance being one which owes its direct and absolute force to an union with other portions of the evidences, with those express and positive testimonies which constitute the specific proofs of revelation.

From Physics, considered as uniting with the moral constitution of things to furnish the grounds of natural theology and ethics, and as participating by consequence in the treatment to which those systems of truth, in their connection with revelation, have been subjected, we are conducted to an incidental relation between Physiology, separately taken, and the Scriptures. Whilst in a variety of subordinate respects natural knowledge illustrates the

sense of holy writ, a more especial relation presents itself between the phenomena which our earth exhibits to the geologist, and certain leading facts in the inspired narrative of Moses. But here also, not less than in regard to the combined relations of natural and moral truth with revelation, views are not unfrequently presented which a sound intellect, conscientiously applied to the subject, must reject; which are disproportionate to the proper character of the connection itself, and to the means there are of rendering it conducive to the purposes of evidence. On the one hand, the tribute derivable from this source to the authority of Scripture is passed over, or is regarded with distrust, as affording no suitable exercise, or a dangerous one, to the understanding; as though the relation between the natural and the Scripture record, because contingent, had no existence; or as though the essential nature of truth could vary with the channels through which it is communicated, and the word and the works of God spoke not, in so far as they are truly comprehended, the same language; might not, even by due intellectual application to them, be rendered in some degree expressive of this harmony. On the other hand, the importance of the relation itself, and of its bearings on the evidences, is magnified, as though the authenticity and divine authority of the Mosaic history were dependent on the establishment of an entire accordance. In the first of these instances, the aggregate force of probable evidence is detracted from by a timid withholding of the understanding from its exercise on particulars conducive to the interests of religious proof, although in no degree decisive of them; in the second, the same collec-

tive proof is invalidated, and the office of the intellect interfered with by fanciful and forced agreement: for under the impression that no point can safely remain unexplained, or need do so where a divine wisdom has on each hand supplied the data, the imagination becomes actively engaged in the indiscriminate removal of difficulties; of difficulties which cannot be expected perhaps wholly to disappear, probable as it is that between records of so different a character, and interpreted by a process so dissimilar, apparent contrarieties there would be, and outweighed as are these seeming variations by opposite certainties; by the mass of evidence for the authority of the writings to whose reconcilement with the phenomena of the natural creation such difficulties have attached themselves; by the consequent certainty that these records must agree; by the points of indubitable agreement that actually have been established.

What is now said, as well as the further consideration which will hereafter be given to this topic, is not intended, it will be seen, to discourage attempts to conciliate the text of Scripture with physiological truth; but, by making good the principles on which such endeavours should be conducted, to secure, in every case, a correct result; to temper the zeal and moderate the anxiety which are sometimes manifested on behalf of a success, which the evidences of religion do not require, and which would be as vainly as unappropriately sought for through a constrained adjustment. Actual discordance, if ultimately on any point it should remain, since it can be such only with reference to

our specific means of removing it, is preferable to a concord effected at the expence of real sacrifices on either side. For that in these *concessions*, as they are sometimes termed, the interests of truth are as little regarded as its character, experience on this subject has already shewn; sooner or later these unauthorized grants are paid back amid all the disadvantages to the subject itself, which the necessity of retractation is sure to bring with it.

On these accounts it appears to be no mean subject of congratulation to the advocates of truth, that physical science has, in the branch of it which regards the study of the earth, obtained of late distinguished encouragement; obtained it in the place where exist the strongest pledges for the principles on which such study will be pursued. And the sound philosophical spirit already manifested by the Professor appointed to this department, when united, as in him it is seen to be, with the ardour of inquiry indispensable to real progress, affords just grounds of confidence, that truth of whatever kind, simple and consistent as this approves itself, in exact proportion to the success with which it has been investigated, will, under such auspices, be secure.

From this general outline of the intended subject-matter of the present discourses, it is time to proceed to the specific plan on which they will be conducted. The proper termination of wanderings is rest, and order of confusion; and the advantage derivable from a consideration of the various possibilities of error which the human mind contrives to realize, is the seeing more distinctly into the means

by which the truths impugned may most successfully be asserted. In the present case are brought under review, and are exemplified, certain errors more or less systematic in regard to the reception of the evidences; and as that reception itself depends on the condition of the human mind to some quality of which both truth and error must address themselves, so in fact it is in mistaken or insufficient views of the mental condition requisite to an inquiry into the truth of religion, that these errors have their origin. With the mental condition, therefore, a beginning will here be made. The claims of a morally-directed intellect, both absolutely and as compared with the other properties of the mind, will be contemplated in reference to faith; and the proper intellectual foundation of that virtue will be maintained against all immediate pretences from within the mind to interfere with it. This will be the subject of the next sermon.

But though the true cause of error will thus have been pointed out and contemplated, and may therefore be dismissed from all further direct consideration, yet the *indirect* pretences under which it conceals itself remain, and must be combated on their own grounds. Accordingly, in the third and fourth discourses, the notion of interruption to the proper intellectual process, in regard to religious proof, by the offices of the Holy Spirit, will be refuted by such full and connected views of the relation borne by them to the human mind, as the desultory and defective representations which abound concerning this doctrine require. All pretence of interruption from this quarter will effectually be shut out; and

the coincidence of the heavenly graces, in ordinary periods, with the course of the mental faculties and with the diligent and impartial application of the intellect to the method and the subject-matter of religious proof, will be distinctly exhibited.

At the outset of the fifth discourse, the same process will be pursued in regard to the other pretences already enumerated, whether as they regard the choice of the mode of proof, or the conduct of the method chosen.

And under the first of these heads it will be explicitly though briefly shewn, that even in regard to primary and fundamental religious truths of demonstrative proof, there cannot be a question. Thenceforward our views will be restricted to the probable method, whose appropriateness to the office of evidencing religion and morals has been dwelt upon in the present sermon; and the proper conduct of this method will be exhibited with reference to the examples of undue depression or exaltation of evidence already adduced. In order to this, a stand will be made, as where probable truth is in question it fitly may, in actual *being;* in the fact of our mental constitution, of whose existence and character consciousness, assisted by reason and experience, suffices to assure us, and in that primary feature of the human mind, a reference to causation, for the purpose of disengaging the question, wherein consists the independent character of natural theology and ethics, from the extraneous matter with which it sometimes is embarrassed, and which hinders the discernment of its true solution. Facts and Scrip-

ture authority will subsequently come in aid of such reasoning, and will concur with it in establishing the independence of the truths in question. Further, definite views will be presented of the relation which the truths thus ascertained to rest on a distinct foundation are thenceforward qualified to bear to the positive communications of the Deity, and of the degree of actual application to the evidences of revealed truth of which they are susceptible. Thus, in the fifth, sixth, and seventh discourses, the errors of those who undervalue, and of those who exaggerate the proper character of natural and moral proof, will alike be rectified.

In the eighth and last sermon, the more immediate conclusions which a review of the previous discussions shall dictate, will be brought home to the younger portion of my hearers. Before, however, the subject thus is closed, the distinct but incidental and subordinate relation between physics, singly taken, and the Mosaic history, will receive the further consideration which has in the present discourse been promised to it.

And on the whole, and although, consistently with the doing even ordinary justice to the points here treated of, a selection of examples from the general subject-matter of the evidences alone was practicable, yet the internal condition of the mind requisite in every case to the impartial consideration of religious proof, will have been represented and insisted on; and the pretences under which the proper intellectual process is interfered with, inquired into, and dissipated. And if it be at the same time

considered, that the portion of the evidences chosen, as well for the correction of the errors which exist respecting it, as for the general elucidation of the principle in exemplification of which these errors are exhibited, is one, the right apprehension of which is indispensable to a similar understanding of that other main branch of evidence, divine and human testimony; that with this branch it maintains also an intimate collateral connection; that the positive attestations have in consequence obtained frequent incidental elucidation in these discourses, not only as much will perhaps appear to have been done as my limits would allow, or as the subject itself could still require, but the actual extension of the same principle to the positive evidences will have been provided for; although in respect of these it less is needed. Indeed so essential and specific is the connection between the several portions of religious evidence, and on so many occasions is an inquirer into any one division of it reminded of this circumstance, that, did not experience teach a contrary lesson, and theory refer us to adequate causes within the mind itself, it might seem a harder task to divorce or to confound such harmonizing parts, than to exhibit them in their just relations.

And although I am professedly contemplating errors within the pale of Christianity, and such as are supposed to consist with a sincere profession of it, yet if it be considered that one principal class of these errors gives advantage to the infidel whom it would oppose, by leaving him in possession of ground not properly his own; that another and contrary class tends to merge in moral representations the

specific truths of Christianity, its facts and its testimonies, which the infidel would gladly see explained away; it will perhaps be thought that a determinate issue given to points so handled by the friends of revelation, as in reality to subserve the purposes of its enemies, has a proper application to both.

To conclude: the proper ascendency of the intellect is a point which requires at all times to be diligently upheld; but a severe additional responsibility attaches to the maintaining of it where religious evidence is concerned, while the temptations to its abandonment are at the same time heightened. In proportion as an obligation thus circumstanced is insufficiently acknowledged and inculcated, must it require to be reproduced and to be dwelt upon; nor does it seem that one main purpose of this lecture, "the establishment of the faith," objectively understood, can in any way be more effectually attained, than by vindicating the intellectual character of the *principle* of faith by which the truth of religion is apprehended, and defending it against such open or secret inroads as may still disturb its application.

SERMON II.

1 Peter iii. 15, 16.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear, having a good conscience.

FROM an incipient indulgence of fancy, sentiment, or will, to the utmost of those excesses in which it is seen to terminate; as well amid pretences to an exclusive possession and correct employment of the powers of reasoning, as amid a studied rejection of them; whatever errors essentially affect the existence or the character of religious belief, are referable ultimately to an insufficient apprehension of the nature and importance of a conscientious conviction of the intellect, and to the denying in consequence to the operations of this faculty their proper influence and efficacy in the composition of faith. Thus an inoperative profession of belief is thought to be accounted for by the assumption that it resides exclusively in the understanding, on which all the while probably it has no real hold; and thus faith and science are conceived to be the objects of different faculties, a notion which, though it should admit of an inquiry by the intellect into the reasons for believing, withdraws indiscriminately from the cognizance of that faculty the truths which religion comprehends.

Before I proceed then, as is the object of this second discourse, to consider the specific nature of certain pretences to interfere with the understanding in its application to the evidences, it may be expedient to assert, in an absolute sense, the proper claims of this faculty itself.

And, in the first place, it deserves attention, that in a conscientious employment of the intellect on religious evidence is implied much more than the term *assent*, historic or other, by which theological writers usually designate the results of the intellectual process, might seem to intimate. It is possible, certainly, that by ill-regulated minds the proofs of religion may be entertained, as might subject-matter of any other kind, without producing any real mental impression, of course, therefore, without any such further effects as faith supposes; but their inefficacy in these cases, instead of detracting from the character of a just intellectual conviction, contributes to establish the conclusion, that, for its attainment, nothing less than a diligent, persevering, and conscientious exercise of the understanding will suffice. Again; a certain assent, and even trust, may arise out of a defective acquaintance with religious proof; but in proportion to the capacity of the mind for fuller views, it will be an assent unproductive of the fruits which religion requires. But a proper conviction is neither inoperative nor ineffectual. The office, indeed, of the understanding in respect of truth once ascertained to be divine, becomes comparatively limited; but a principled belief, after taking its root in that faculty, fails not to present, at every subsequent stage of its

progress, indications of its origin. Further, the relation which subsists between the other mental qualities and the intellect has a tendency to forward every part of the process necessary to the completeness of faith. For when the mind is in that moral state which conscientious inquiry supposes, the intellect, even when submitting in common with the other mental qualities to a divine and paramount authority, still retains over these its customary controul, so as to ensure the proper discharge of their subordinate but efficient functions; and such functions consist in carrying onward the convictions of the understanding into all the various particulars by which a proper faith discovers itself. Of the actual influence of such convictions, of the importance of securing to the intellect its primary and appropriate office in the production of them, a remarkable exemplification is supplied in the restraint experienced on the part of those, who, by resigning the government of their minds to passion and appetite, are establishing an immoral state of them. So long as the intellect is not dispossessed of its convictions, those other qualities are seldom seen to allow themselves an entire licence.

And if such is the nature and importance of a proper satisfaction of the intellect, if this faculty not only has a direct and immediate efficacy in regard to religious faith, but is one on which the other mental powers depend for their due place and employment,

The second proposition noticed, that faith is not the object of the same faculty with science, is plainly

inadmissible. For although, where the question is of religious doctrine and precept, and of the motives to hope and fear which religion generally, which revelation in its threats and promises specifically, holds out, another faculty, the will, with which science has no proper concern, be called into action, yet is it employed in subordination to the understanding, cannot claim therefore to be regarded as appropriate to faith, in contradistinction to the intellect. It is the *understanding*, in every case, which must inquire into the grounds for believing, whether the method of proof be that of sense or of probability; it is the understanding that determines the belief of those religious truths to be our duty, which it ascertains to bear the stamp of intimations from the Deity. Its functions, which have an unrestricted bearing on natural theology and ethics, on the evidences which these supply to revelation, on the specific testimonies to revealed truth, are not without a qualified application to that truth itself. For although this faculty pretends not to bring to the test of reason the proper doctrines of revelation, yet in some definite sense, and as matter of fact at the least, it in every instance apprehends even these; while it is possessed of principles for judging more fully and decisively of such natural and moral truths as are found incorporated amid truths revealed. Lastly, to the understanding belongs the giving the impulse to the will and affections; the authorizing and directing such employment as can fitly be assigned to them in respect both of the principle and the subject-matter of religious faith. If then it were said, that science and faith are the objects of one and the same faculty in dif-

ferent applications of it, the proposition would be tenable; they give occupation in effect in two several modes to the human understanding, as directed in the one case to what is demonstrable, and therefore may be known; in the other, to what, on the evidence of probable reasoning, or sense, or testimony, may be believed or credited.

On the whole, the principle of belief, employed first on the evidences of religion, and then on the truths—the subject-matter—the *faith* of which religion is composed, has not merely a rational character; it subsists habitually in the intellectual as well as the moral powers, and in the will and affections under their guidance. Indeed, the determination long since given to the question agitated in the schools, whether the *principle* of faith could be the *subject* of two distinct faculties, supplies the just ground of discrimination between the intellect and the other mental properties. Faith, it was agreed, might reside both in the intellect and the will, so it were understood to exist in this last subordinately and derivatively. To propose to the will as motives those argments which it has in the first instance itself adopted, is the proper office of the understanding. To that operation of the mind, which is by some attributed to a distinct internal sense, appertains the bringing home the moral force of the proofs received; and from these several mental exercises arise respectively, 1st. Conviction. 2d. An apprehending, and self-application of the particulars contained in the religion of whose truth we have been convínced. 3d. Hope and trust; a cheerful and fiduciary acquiescence in the promises of reli-

gion, and in the divine authority on which they are established. The results are such acts, internal and outward, as attest to ourselves and others the reality and strengthen the principle of the faith in which they originate. The Holy Spirit superintends the process, prevents, accompanies, consummates our endeavours, converts (where these have not been wanting) belief upon probable grounds into certainty, both of belief and of adherence, exalts through its specific succours the intellectual and moral virtue of human faith into a faith that is spiritual or divine. The criterion, mean time, of the soundness of the human foundations, in which the faith has primarily been laid, is the believer's ability to "give a reason "of the hope that is in him;" not a reason or *account* of the subject-matter to be believed, for this may not always be attainable; not a reason of that ultimate "confidence and rejoicing of hope" derivable to the individual from his self-application of the truth, for this must vary with his internal condition, and as arising out of the concurrent testimonies of the spiritual fruits, and of his own conscience, regards only himself; but an exhibition of the evidences on which religion demands to be believed, a reason why the "hopes" held out by it may be confided in.

Experience, however, forbids the expectation, that in these fuller and more definite views of faith the human mind will at any period contentedly acquiesce. It exchanges them, in fact, for notions which, by their partiality, may flatter some one favourite mental quality at the expence of the rest; or which, by their indiscriminate character, tend to

substitute a general licence in the room of that order which is essential to true liberty. Under these circumstances the intellect is no longer honestly applied to the attainment of a sound belief; the rational principle of faith is detached from the fiduciary; hope is entertained on grounds as unappropriate as they are ineffectual to the purpose for which they are introduced; and in this condition of the mind, inert in respect of its proper duties, and active only for the purposes of disorder, the heavenly influences are assumed to descend in a sense and measure which may supply the place of exertions designedly withheld, of a diligent and unostentatious employment of the appointed methods of conviction.

On proceeding, however, to the consideration of the specific pretences on which it is thus attempted to interfere with the office of the intellect, or to supersede it, two difficulties present themselves. First, since the intellectual claims, and their relations to those of the other mental qualities, have been now distinctly, though in general terms, asserted, any particular inquiry into such pretences as are at variance with them, may on a primary view appear not to deserve, and so will not obtain attention; while, in the second place, the indeterminate expressions under which the substituted methods of obtaining satisfaction as to the truth of religion are exhibited, render it difficult to apply to them so direct and specific a refutation, as would bring with it its own apology. But it should be considered, that what is admitted in general terms is not therefore necessarily apprehended in as distinct a sense as the

truth requires, while in proportion as the errors in question would evade our scrutiny, arises an increased occasion for applying it. To encounter them with generalities, such as they themselves are couched in, would be their safeguard. And the plan on which these discourses are framed is well adapted to procure a definite issue to such inquiry; for of the powers and qualities of the human mind, with whose relations to evidence we are here concerned, our knowledge, although of a practical character, is considerable; and the sort of satisfaction in regard to religious truth, which any faculty, when considered as occupying the place of the intellect, is capable of conveying to the mind, need not long remain problematical.

Now it were vain theoretically to refuse to incidental circumstances an influence, which at all events they in fact must have in bringing the mind to this inquiry concerning the truth of religion irregularly. Except in these seats of learning, religious evidence seldom presents itself in the form of system, rarely, at the least, is so studied, and the subject-matter of our faith is familiarized to the mind at an age when its proofs would hardly be intelligible. Impressed, therefore, with the moral beauties of holy writ, or excited by the offer of means of grace and happiness, manifestly adapted to the wants and wishes of our nature, the mind may insensibly have imbibed that persuasion of the heart, which the evidences of Christianity will not fail to justify by subinducing the conviction of the understanding. But though thus much may be allowed in respect of the method of arriving at truths,

whose transcendent importance requires the facilitating through every mean an actual acquaintance with them, yet even in these instances, and in regard to the very points whence so much gratification of a moral sort is imparted, to ascertain the character and degree of the *proof* derivable from them, and to employ it suitably to the quality and weight so assigned to it, is exclusively the office of the intellect. The other mental qualities are concerned in the process only as they may purvey materials for the exercise of the judgment. To imagine or to feel religion to be true, (and the imagination, though it be not formally insisted on as an instrument of suasion, has often no small share in it,) is plainly no step towards the satisfying either ourselves or others that it is so; and the ethics of Scripture might be strictly consonant to the moral sentiments of the human mind, without involving the divine authority, or even the truth of the dispensation in which those ethics are incorporated. Yet has the contrary notion assumed a systematic form, and the capacity to apprehend the moral differences, and the tendency to approve and censure in conformity to them which we are conscious of, have been proposed as the ultimate tests, not of *moral* truth alone, but of truth as such and universally. Now this is to confound the moral quality inherent in all truth, and the specific character appertaining to the truths of morality, with the intellectual or historical character, in which consists the distinction of truth from falsehood. In regard to the two former of these, sentiment, aided by experience, affords to reason and conscience the requisite distinctions, in order to the judging and applying

morally; it furnishes no such means for deciding on the proper and generic character of truth. This is the object solely of the intellect. The "good con- "science," mentioned in the text, is introduced there, not as in any degree supplanting the understanding, but in order to the ensuring such an actual condition of this faculty, as may capacitate it for exercising jointly with the intellect its mental controul. More generally the Scriptures rest not the truth of religion in any degree on appeals to sentiment or fancy. As a corroboration, indeed, of the fact of his being sent from God, our Lord adverts to the purity[b] of his doctrine, but the reference is argumentative; and though his miracles possessed incontestably what might captivate the imagination and interest the feelings of mankind, no stress is laid on them in this view; their object is belief; and they are addressed for this end through the outward senses to the understanding. The mental process required was short, but it was rational; "No man could do such miracles," could exert that supernatural power for such purposes, and in such a cause, "unless God were with him."

On behalf, however, of a sentimental suasion, a plea is sometimes urged, which, however undeserving in any other view of the notice of this auditory, yet inasmuch as it tends to encroach on the universality of the principle for which I am contending, must not be allowed to pass altogether unregarded. There are, it is assumed, persons capable of reading

[b] Amongst instances of this kind, our Lord's references to "the "truth" in St. John have a moral, as well as intellectual, sense.

and meditating upon the Scriptures, and thus, as well as by an intelligent application to the other outward means of grace, deriving to themselves no inconsiderable degree of acquaintance with the truths of religion, who yet are unequal to the apprehending of its proofs. To these, it is conceived, the channel of moral suasion may suffice. Now, if a comprehension of the entire body of religious evidence, its grounds, its relations, its bearings, were required from the ordinary believer, a difficulty would certainly thus exist, though mere persuasion would have no proper tendency to remove it. It is not, however, a learned "reason" the apostle in the text intends, but such an one as every sound intellect, faithfully applied to the subject, may obtain. From the creation generally, from our own mental constitution in particular, primary religious proofs admit of being familiarly induced, so as to become intelligible to very ordinary understandings; and testimony, a species of evidence whose theory is of the simplest kind, and with which all are practically conversant, puts the inquirer in possession of the Scriptures, and through them of those divine attestations to the truth of revelation, in which the moral notions of the Deity, antecedently acquired, will have prepared him to confide. Or suppose (what, however, experience is far from justifying) that more is here attributed to ordinary capacities than the truth of the case allows, that the degree of intellect and mental culture requisite to a saving acquaintance with the *truths* of religion suffices not also (with the aid of such ministerial instruction as the Scriptures suppose) for the reception of the *evidences*, even then the uneducated mind will per-

form an act of *reason* in abiding by those sensible attestations to revealed truth, which the actual subsistence of a visible church, not authoritatively enjoining belief, nor requiring an implicit one, but "the witness and keeper of holy writ," which a standing ministry, which permanent ordinances, supply in a certain degree to all, though in a fuller sense to the intelligent and well instructed. It is not improbable, further, where the volume of revelation and other means of grace are duly resorted to, that on minds not inured to self-observation, the contents of the Scriptures themselves, as compared together, and coupled with their internal character, may imperceptibly be operating towards a proper conviction of the intellect. In short, a reason there must be, however divested of the forms of ratiocination, or the faith, not having an ultimate foundation in the understanding, will be unsound. The extent of the reason must depend on the degree of capacity and culture of the mind which is to entertain it. The anomalous state of those who neither can apprehend the fuller evidences of religion, nor will defer to the simple but correct particulars of proof which they might readily appreciate, is one for which neither reason nor religion can be expected to provide. A fanciful and voluntary character is implied in the very supposition of such a state; there is a moral defect engrafted upon, and turning to its purposes, the intellectual one; and if even *exceptions* will not hold on behalf of the sufficiency of a sentimental persuasion, what have not writers to answer for, who expressly lead the way to enthusiasm, by contending for that sufficiency absolutely and without distinction?

More plausibly, but with equal incorrectness, a positive bias of the *will* in favour of religion is insisted on, in order to the establishment of the foundations of belief. But first, on the supposition, which is unwarranted, that any addition to the influence of the proper proofs of religion on the understanding could be needed, the will has no tendency correctly to supply it. It is true the argument *a tuto*, as it is termed, (in itself not without its use in engaging the mind to a due *examination* of the evidences,) has, by writers of no common celebrity, been applied to the enforcing a determination to believe at all events in a religion, which offers to the human mind the happiness it covets; but a volition, however intense, however absolute, cannot contribute any thing towards conviction. The only suitable application to the will is that of *motives*, having a bearing upon truths already ascertained; in other words, a moral one. In this view, the will may be, and by nature is, under an influence that has need to be removed, before the love and desire of truth, which are otherwise congenial to the human mind, can exert themselves: for though he who merely wills to believe, cannot by this his resolution, and independently of inquiry, induce a proper conviction, yet he whose will is in an immoral state cannot be expected to inquire even; the intellect is in such case deprived more or less of its ascendency in the mind, and of the proper exercise of its functions. The pretence advanced then relates to a *moral* bias; and if no more be meant by it than a willingness to seek the truth as such, and for its own sake, a disposition to ascertain the will of God, as is the duty of a rational and moral creature, with that ulterior view to

obedience, which is the proper test of our sincerity, such a condition of the will is readily admitted to be indispensable: it is implied in a moral state of the mind, or in the possession of a "good conscience." But with the proper love of truth is connected a jealousy of adopting what may not be such; and a very ill effect, one highly injurious to the character and force of the evidences for religion, must be produced in the mind of an inquirer, by its being held out to him, that in a matter so properly intellectual as the examination of proof, such a state of the will was needed, and such an influence was to be allowed to it over the understanding, as should detract from the task of full examination, or induce an acquiescence in reasoning, which on any other subject would be regarded as inadmissible. On the contrary, in proportion to the implicitness of the submission due to the authority of divine truth when ascertained to be such, are we bound to investigate strictly the validity of all pretensions to that character; and so difficult is it to regulate the operations of the will when introduced antecedently to the decisions of the understanding, so destructive is its interference of that main security for the subsequent character of the faith, an impartial conviction of the intellect, so numerous and preponderating at the same time are the evidences of religion, that the state of mind most favourable on the whole to such inquiry, because productive ultimately of proper satisfaction, is that which approaches the nearest to a perfect freedom from whatever human influence. And the Scriptures require not more than this. It was a positive averseness of the will from *truth*, as such, that our Lord reprehended in the Jews, not

the absence of an inclination in favour of the specific doctrines he was delivering, otherwise than as they were identified with truth itself; "Because I "tell you the truth, ye believe me not[c]." Less evidence, and of a less decisive character than was afforded them of our Saviour's mission, would have secured a just determination of their understandings, if their wills had not been under an opposite bias.

But, it will from certain quarters be urged, if the inferior qualities of the mind cannot in any degree supersede the proper office of the understanding in respect of evidence, yet may satisfaction as to the truth of religion be imparted from on high; and either the language employed on this head is indeterminate, and the Scripture authorities introduced are unaccompanied with any intimation of the sense and extent in which the application of them is intended, or on the other hand, where a precise meaning is affixed to terms and to authorities, it is one so positively antiscriptural, that under these representations of a doctrine which requires more than ordinary caution in the treatment of it, there is no variety of error that may not find a shelter. When contemplated, however, even with a limited view, such as that of its relation to the evidences, the subject of the divine influences involves so much of general doctrine, as to require a separate and detailed consideration of it. What remains of the present discourse will but suffice to give a definite conclusion to the points already contemplated.

[c] John viii. 40, 45.

And first, there is equal error in detaching the proper exercise of the intellect from faith, and conscience from either. Separated from conscience, the understanding will not adequately address itself to religious evidence, or will neglect to carry on its belief to the will and affections; will not urge the application of it by the other qualities of the mind, to the fuller purposes of faith and obedience. Again, unless the intellect have supplied a groundwork on which faith may be securely rested, conscience will be without an adequate rule; and the errors of an unintelligent piety may, as experience testifies, be fundamental. Where in any way this bond is broken, and the union between what is true and good is disregarded; those active but inferior inmates of the mind, which under a combined intellectual and moral controul are eminently useful instruments of truth and duty, become mischievous in proportion to their efficiency. Conscience or intellect, the appointed governors of the mind, once become subservient to their irregular influence, the reception given to proof is disingenuous, is fanciful, is self-willed; is by necessary consequence unsound and partial. Sentimental even it may be, where there is this disunion and misrule, without, as we have seen, proving on that account the more correct. It is in fact amid claims to refined sentimental persuasion that the Christian scheme is resolved into a sublime morality, and its positive attestations into ordinary occurrences, or into allegory. This is indeed an extreme and complex instance of abuse; but it exemplifies a truth which lies at the foundation of all inquiries into faith, namely, that in

the absence of a conviction of the intellect proportioned to the capacity of the individual, and to his general mental culture and attainment, and of this conviction cherished as it at first was formed, under the influence of conscience, the mind, having no ultimate point of reference within itself, no counterpoise to the suggestions from without, which even profane learning may in such case of itself present, either falls away amid temptations to incredulity, or is at the mercy of every mental fantasy; is invariably tending towards an abandonment of the truth, or towards the perversion of it.

On the other hand, where the proper character of religious proof, and the various and concurrent branches which constitute its aggregate have been conscientiously examined and appreciated by the intellect, and the mind has had full opportunity of discovering on how broad and how appropriate a foundation religion is established, there will be no pretext for complaining of the inoperative character of a belief originating in the understanding, or vainly seeking a substitute for it in some other faculty. The intellect, when thus discharging its specific functions, will communicate a correspondent soundness and efficiency to every other part of the mental operations which the completer virtue of Christian faith requires. As little question will there be of the capricious liberties which are taken by professed believers with the letter and the sense of Scripture, and which materially affect the subject-matter of the evidences. Such partial and insincere treatment of records, of whose authority the mind entertained an honest and deliberate conviction, would be inexpli-

cable. The difficulty sometimes experienced in admitting the more mysterious doctrines of revelation, which yet are so attested as to render the implicit belief of them an act of reason, arises less from an indisposition to defer to authority acknowledged to be divine, than from the having neglected the means of arriving at a sufficient conviction of the claims of those doctrines to such a character. Again: to the same defective application of the intellect to the subject of the evidences, and to the predominance of passion and affection, are to be attributed the disproportionate or exclusive attachments to certain doctrines in reality of minor importance to the faith, and to these in such exaggerated views of them, as a sound understanding, duly exercising its legitimate authority within the mind, would not allow to be entertained there.

What pretext then can remain for interference from within the mind with the specific functions of the understanding? None, certainly, in regard either to the nature of proof, or to the conduct of it. The view now taken of the constitution of the human mind, brief as it has been, forbids the very supposition; involves a positive exclusion of such interference. Sentiment and will, we have seen, and if so, how much more fancy and affection, are incapable of becoming in any degree the vehicles of a proper conviction; and they have a subordinate office to perform consequent on the functions of the intellect in respect of faith, which is incompatible with such a disorderly state as their giving disturbance to the intellect supposes. Even the suasion which they create will, when they are no longer

under proper government, partake of the distorted views in which both truth and evidence must present themselves to minds so circumstanced. If the question be of the kind of proof, it will be well, in such case, if sensible rather than demonstrative evidence be not the imaginary substitute for the probable; while even where this last method of proof is acquiesced in, advantage will be taken of the numerous occasions of abuse which exist in respect of the conduct of it. Exalted or depressed accordingly, rejected or exclusively enforced, will be certain branches or particulars, as sentiment, or fancy, or self-will may incline. And if *direct* interference with the intellect from such quarters be not admissible, hardly will it be contended for as operating *indirectly*. For where the pretences, which in such cases are alleged, suffice not to justify themselves, the real causes, far from affording any help, must, in proportion as they are discerned, betray the service they are employed in; and when not detected, will be still more dangerous.

Finally, the meekness and fear with which (according to the most [d] probable interpretation of the text) the apostle enjoins us to accompany our reasons rather than supposes the inquirer to apply for them; that temperate and prudent spirit, which not the first Christians alone had need of, which is in accordance with the character and essential to the interests of truth itself, will be materially promoted by a conscientious intellectual application to the subject of the evidences. These, as they gradually sub-

[d] Verse 16 seems to decide the point.

stitute for the agitations of doubt, the unwarranted confidence of mere persuasion, or the still less intelligent decisions of the will, a stable and satisfactory "reason of the hope" that is in ourselves, will infuse into us the temper in which we best may recommend the same security for their faith to others; "Our "speech will be alway with grace seasoned with "salt; and we shall know how we ought to answer "every man."

SERMON III.

1 John iv. 1.

Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.

RELIGIOUS error is then least liable to detection, when it attaches itself to points of primary importance, and which, in their full extent, transcend the reach of human intelligence. Advantage is in this case taken of the general interest which the subject creates, and of the degree of mysteriousness which belongs to it, to represent as inapplicable and even presumptuous, the discriminative course of inquiry which alone can separate what is intelligible or true, from what is involved in obscurity, or erroneous. This remark has an especial application to the subject of the divine influences.

When the due employment of the intellect on religious proof is resisted by the express substitution of some other property of the mind for the understanding, the error may be pointed out, and the just prerogatives of reason be asserted. But if, while we are required to admit the reality of certain immediate communications from on high of truth or evidence, or a certain character as belonging to the moral graces of the Spirit, which would supersede or interfere with the functions of the intellect, the

objections to these pleas may be anticipated and overruled by indeterminate references to the unlimited and incomprehensible character of spiritual operations; the mind will be no longer restrained from expatiating, amid whatever varieties of error such a subject indistinctly seen may present to an ill-regulated imagination; and vague and imperfect notions on this important topic must be perpetuated.

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is," or under an eminently spiritual dispensation, "there is liberty," not licence; not a discharge from the duty of ascertaining what such a dispensation, whether in respect of truth or evidence, has in fact delivered. How far writers who claim a latitude in this respect for themselves or others, or who indulge in it without the claim, may discern its nature, its tendencies, whither it in fact is leading them, is comparatively immaterial. The cause of religious truth is concerned in reducing their pretences to so determinate a form as may render them the object of refutation; or if from their indistinct and ambiguous character this be not always practicable, in treating so definitely of the subject itself as to leave no place for error.

And as clear and determinate views are here especially needed, so are they within our reach, provided we will be content to see a boundary interposed between our knowledge and our ignorance, and will forbear to seek for truth beyond the limits which that boundary prescribes. For the sacred records, whence alone we derive any proper knowledge of the doctrine in question, constitute, when subjected to just rules of interpretation, a definite source of

instruction; exclude all occasion of speculating as to what *may* be true, by authoritatively acquainting us with what *is* so. Even in the Scriptures indeed we learn but little as to the *nature* of the Holy Spirit; more on the abstract point of spiritual existence would be unintelligible or useless. Again: as his actual operation is imperceptible, so neither are we instructed in the mode of it; but relatively we have all the information which our circumstances can require. For holy writ apprizes us of the reality and specific characters of these aids, of the circumstances under which they may be expected, of the fruits through which their habitual presence is discoverable; and this information is sufficient to secure every honest and diligent inquirer from ignorance in respect to this doctrine, and from confounding it with the suggestions of his own fancy. And, as might be expected, we are not without a certain degree of assistance from our mental constitution, that is, from the object to which spiritual gifts apply themselves, towards correctly apprehending what the Scriptures thus deliver. Indeed, holy writ itself may be said to point our attention to this quarter, when it requires on our parts both cooperation and fruits. In so doing it sanctions the conclusions derivable from observation and from consciousness, that the Holy Spirit alters not the specific character of our faculties, disturbs not by his ordinary influences the proper course of them, comes into contact with them in a way not inconsistent with their customary exercise; and whatever cannot, from either of these sources, be clearly and precisely collected, we are altogether without any proper liberty to assume; for it is to little purpose that the Scriptures

have afforded us definite information, or have conveyed, under various forms of expression, the caution not to be wise above what is written, if, from what they have told us on this or on any other subject, we pass on into the regions of mere possibility. But further, in regard to this very point, holy writ has in the text enjoined circumspection. The injunction to " try the spirits whether they are of " God," had no doubt a primary and especial application to the age of miracles, supposed a sort of discernment with which we are unprovided, because we can have no proper occasion of employing it; but that in a modified sense it refers also to ordinary periods, is evident, from our being furnished in the same Scriptures with a standard of doctrine in regard to the divine influences, and with a criterion for ascertaining whether such graces from on high, as we still are taught to expect, have in any given instance been in fact imparted.

And the character of the errors prevalent on this subject, while it leaves no room to doubt of the sanction they afford to a disorderly condition of the human mind, indicates that they owe their rise to it. An undisciplined imagination, attaching itself habitually to those supernatural teachings and manifestations, which, not for present purposes alone, but with an ultimate view to the permanent means of conviction we now enjoy, the Holy Spirit has successively vouchsafed in former ages, arrives at the point of misapprehending the real features of those interpositions, and of the times in which they occurred; perceives not that the character of these last was that of a mediate divine government, in

part suspended; that the interpositions which, for the purposes of a new religion, supplied both evidence and truth to the passive intellect, disturbed not usually the moral influence on individuals in respect of their salvation, of which the same displays of power and knowledge might be productive; interfered not with the customary and ordinary course of moral grace. Then, these interpositions, thus misunderstood, are supposed to be at all periods within the scope of revelation.

I. Under these impressions, and in the first place, the purely moral character of ordinary spiritual influences is lost sight of, and the Holy Spirit is represented as habitually operating not only in order to the bringing home to the mind truths and evidences already supplied, but for the purpose of teaching and convincing anew; and as operating not through appointed means and generally, but in an immediate and partial sense, in order to the determining of individual salvation.

II. Next, and as the consequence to such fundamental error, the conditions on which the divine influences may in ordinary periods be looked for are disregarded; and because a passive state of mind was best adapted to render it the instrument of faithfully and for public ends conveying to mankind truths and attestations to those truths when first and supernaturally imparted, an indolent dependence on the Holy Spirit for such influences as may controul the mind and supply the place of human exertion, is substituted for those free and active endeavours, which, where individual religious welfare is

in question, the Scriptures and our mental constitution suppose or prescribe.

III. Thirdly, the indirect indeed but only scriptural test by which the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit, and the several degrees of it implied in a progressively improving or a confirmed state of grace, may be ascertained, namely, the fruits, is exchanged for a supposed instantaneous and sensible testimony of the Spirit, which is assumed to be the proper and only certain indication of his presence.

These several notions once established in the mind, holy writ is resorted to for what a preoccupied fancy never fails to meet with, texts, which on a superficial view appear to sanction them.

The remedy then must be to reverse this process; to avail ourselves of the hold on error which is afforded by specific appeals to Scripture, and to reclaim to the cause of correct and definite doctrine, in the first place, passages which have been wrested to a contrary purpose. The sense which a just interpretation of these is seen to dictate, will of itself go far towards exposing and refuting the opinions, out of which such perversions have arisen. Still, so long as a pretext is left on which these notions can subsist, the habit of misconstruing the sacred volume on their behalf will scarcely be discontinued. The conclusions therefore which particular texts may furnish will have need to be confirmed by more comprehensive views of Scripture facts and doctrine; such as may take the ground from under the pretences themselves; such as shall establish the proper character

of the miraculous periods, and of the divine manifestations which distinguished them; of their relations to the contemporaneous moral influences of the same Spirit, to the ordinary divine economy, and to our own mental habits and constitution; such as may exhibit likewise their ultimate relation and reference to a period of exclusively mediate and moral influence. In this way the notions in question may be effectually disposed of; will shew themselves to be inconsistent with a correct apprehension, whether of the Christian or of any former revelation, not less than of the principles by which the natural and moral administration of the Deity is discernibly regulated. By no course short of the one now proposed can the nature and extent of the relations which spiritual influences still maintain with the human mind in respect of religious evidence, be appreciated. So long as partial and confused representations of the general doctrine prevail, no particular branch of it will be secure from error; and so close is the connection between the several component parts of the virtue of faith, between a rational conviction of the truth of the Christian revelation and a due reception on the part of the understanding of its specific doctrines; so considerable a portion of the evidences (when once the authority of the Scriptures themselves has been established) is derived in common with the doctrines from the inspired records; in so many passages of holy writ are certain facts contemplated in the twofold light of doctrine and of proof, that the greater part of what can be shewn to be correct and true in respect of the divine influences in their application to the *evidences* of our

faith, will hold good of them also in their application to its *doctrines*.

To proceed then to such exemplifications of the three several heads of error already specified, as texts of Scripture, in the treatment they not unfrequently experience, will supply.

I. Under the first head, that of an expectation of immediate and special communications of *evidence* or *truth* for the salvation of the individual, it is observable, that the class of passages usually adduced for the purpose of depreciating the appointed methods of religious conviction and instruction, regards indeed, prospectively or otherwise, an increased diffusion of evidence and knowledge, as well as of moral influence, and assigns it to the Holy Spirit as the author; but then it is represented as attached to a system of means, to a dispensation, to that very dispensation under which we live. It is with an uniform reference to the Christian scheme, that the expression "to be taught of God," and other equivalent phrases of which so inconsiderate an use is sometimes made, are employed in the Scriptures; whether by our Lord himself, who in the sixth of St. John makes this express application of the prophecy of Isaiah[a]; or by St. Paul, who reminds the Thessalonians[b], that through the means of his apostolic care they had been "taught of God to love one

[a] Isaiah liv. 13.

[b] 1 Thessal. iv. 9; compare the two first verses of the same chapter.

" another ;" or by St. John, who in his first Epistle [c] describes the Christians to whom he writes, as having an " unction from the Holy One, and knowing all " things ;" as baptized persons who had received the instruction which that rite supposes, and the chrism, which then was consequent upon it; as not " needing " therefore that any man should teach them," least of all the seducers, against whom it was his design to warn them, who pretended to other views of the Christian truth than those which a due regard to this apostle's teaching would have ensured. In passages of this description, there is an ultimate question certainly of express revelation, but it is of that by which the truths of Christianity were primarily and for general ends communicated ; of means of conviction from on high, but it is of those which were even then accumulating, in order to a purpose which they have since fulfilled. Emanating from the Holy Spirit, and transmitted through an inspired ministry in the first instance, incorporated subsequently in written records, both the truths themselves and the divine attestations to them are there definitively and for the use of all [d] provided. Accordingly, although truth and evidence are frequently spoken of in the New Testament as proceeding from the holy Spirit of God, yet wherever such mention of them occurs, there is usually an express reference, always an implied one, to the primary teaching of the Holy Ghost, and to the extraordinary manifestations by which that divine tuition was accompanied, to the " demonstrations of Spirit

[c] 1 John ii. 20. 27.

[d] Jer. xxxi. 34.

" and of power" with which the apostles were " put " in trust," to the *means* of universal conviction and instruction which were to be finally supplied through an inspired volume. And if it be argued that certain expressions in those passages, while they admit of application to the intellectual faculty alone, or to influences of the Spirit of God which have the understanding plainly for their object, represent at the same time these graces as continually and at all periods derivable from on high; that they cannot be interpreted of the Christian truth as orally taught under the influences of the Spirit in the apostolic age, and as now consigned under the same superintendence to writing; the answer is to be found in a distinction which is indispensable to the right apprehension of numerous places in the sacred Epistles, namely, that the intellect is the faculty to which the *moral* influences of the Holy Spirit are in such instances specifically directed. Further, it is indisputably true, that the *success* with which this diffusion of grace and knowledge is to be attended has been largely spoken of; but then it is the success attendant on the general means with which the dispensation was provided, and as such, embraces the early, the rapid, and extensive communication of Gospel truth in the apostolic age; the yet fuller prevalence of the same truth which is to take place finally; the intermediate stages, or ordinary Gospel periods; lastly, the universality of the Gospel design and tendencies at all times: and it embraces them both absolutely, and also as contrasted with the object and the results of former dispensations. Of especial communications from on high of any kind,

in order to the insuring the salvation of individuals, there is not in such prophecies and declarations the slightest question.

Nor were the *moral* influences of the Spirit, such as still continue to be granted, other than *mediate*, even in the apostolic age. It was through prayer, it was in order to the obtaining the full moral benefit of their application to the Gospel doctrine, that on behalf of his converts of Corinth, of Ephesus, of Colosse, St. Paul invoked the appropriate influences of the Comforter.

Indeed, of the various texts of Scripture employed in support of notions opposed to the doctrine now laid down, employed to encourage a hope of *immediate* and *particular* communications, whether of truth, of evidence, or of moral grace, it may be affirmed, that, far from affording to it any real countenance, they, when rightly understood, inculcate the obligation of resorting to those general means of conviction and of spiritual help, which the divine dispensations, in proportion as they are accessible, present. The passages principally enlisted in such a service therefore, when restored to their true sense, involve the condemnation also of an *inert* and *passive* waiting for communications from above, such as often accompanies the neglect of means; and on this account may not improperly be carried on for consideration to my second head, whence they will cast a strong reflex light upon the points which I have been now establishing. By juxta-position also they will elucidate each other.

II. "If any man will do the will of him that "sent me," said our Lord, "he shall know of the "doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak "of myself[e]:" *know*, as the passage is sometimes interpreted, by immediate and special supernatural intimations; and what is at most supposed to be requisite on our parts towards becoming the objects of such interference, is a certain velleity or faint inclination of the mind, unattested by acts or evidences of its sincerity. But whoever attends to the series of our Lord's discourses in the fifth and following chapters of St. John's Gospel, and to certain remarkable and mutually illustrative expressions which our Lord employs there, will, on such a connected view of the subject-matter to which this particular text refers, see reason probably to determine, not only that it lends no support to the notion, that we may passively wait for impressions of the kind in question; (thus much an ordinary interpretation which is sound and scriptural[f], though wide, I think,

[e] John vii. 17.

[f] Namely, that independently of any express promise which, however, according to this interpretation, the passage may also contain, practice confirms the principles in which it originates, gives fuller insight into the truths we actually are obeying, and qualifies for further knowledge: as, on the other hand, indolence and vice disturb the reasoning powers and the judgment. Θέλῃ, in that case, would be redundant. But the tenor of these chapters shews, that ποιεῖν τὸ θέλημα must be taken in a more extensive sense, so as to embrace belief not less than practice. To "do "the will and work of God," was, in the specific instance, to "believe on him whom God had sent." In order to this, a general willingness, a principled disposition to do the will of God, whatever it might be, and whether it regarded belief or practice, was indispensable.

of the point intended, would imply,) but that it expressly discountenances such error. The construction and the phrases employed in the passages alluded to are not indeed always such, as, on a partial or transient view, will dictate this understanding of them; but our Lord's design appears on the whole to be that of asserting the relations which the doctrine he was promulgating bore to the general evidences, and means of whatever kind, by which the Deity had prepared the way for its reception. The Jews adduced[g] their especial intercourse with God as a reason for not giving ear to the proofs and truths presented them by our Saviour. "Every "one," replies our Lord, "that hath heard[h]," so heard as to have profited by the communication, and "learned of the Father," by the light and through the graces of whatever antecedent dispensation, "cometh unto Christ." "No man can "come except it be given to him of the Father[i];" unless the Father "give him to Christ[k];" unless the Father "draw him[l]." The circumstance of their having till then been the peculiar people of God, and having, as such, been within the reach of especial opportunities of knowledge and of grace, would, if they had made a diligent and proper use of them, have constituted, in respect of the Jews, a real *traction*, would, on our Lord's presenting himself, have had its due conclusion in their doing the "will or work of God[m]," by "believing on him "whom God had sent." This argument our Lord

[g] John viii. 41, 42.
[h] John vi. 45.
[i] John vi. 65.
[k] John vi. 37.
[l] John vi. 44.
[m] John vi. 28, 29.

repeatedly and under great variety of form brings home to those with whom he is discoursing. In the text which I am more especially considering, he affirms, not promises: whoever has a principled resolution to admit and comply with the will of God as such, will not fail so to employ the means already at his disposal, as to exhibit, whenever the occasion presents itself, that further, that especial, that paramount proof of his regard for the divine will, the ascertaining, the *knowing*, the *acknowledging*, that the Christian doctrine is from God. Erected into an universal proposition, the meaning will be this: There is an essential connection between the several divine dispensations. Whoever, by the aid of such grace as the dispensation he is living under may supply, has brought his mind into that moral state in which alone the intellect can properly approach religious inquiry; whoever has adopted and is habitually acting upon that only adequate principle of conscience, conformity to the divine will in whatever manner and degree imparted; will not fail to inquire after and to recognise the various particular intimations of that will, whose substance is to conscience as its rule. The circumstance of his being already in possession of so much of this rule as reason, in its application to natural and moral truth, or as the Jewish revelation can afford, instead of discharging him from the duty of examining the evidences, and assuring himself of the truth and the particulars of any further divine communication, will, in exact proportion as it involves the means of fulfilling this obligation, contribute to the strengthening it. He will thus be prepared and engaged, both by principle and habit, to allow to

each mode and instance of divine manifestation its proper weight; to discern their mutual relations, and the harmony which pervades them all; to admit their common claim upon his regard, on account of the quarter whence they all proceed. "There are "some of you that believe not; therefore said I unto "you, that no man can come unto me, except it were "given unto him of the Father[n]:" except he come through a ready and persevering employment of those specific methods which the Father has to this end provided. No especial channels of belief, then, are in this passage declared to be opened from on high, to enable individuals to "know of the doctrine" immediately; nor is there a question of controuling influences over a passive and inert understanding. On the contrary, materials of conviction, it is seen, are supplied (though in various degrees) to all; and a certain moral condition of the mind is insisted on as requisite to the correct and the sufficient use of them. Towards this mental condition, and for the success of an application to those means, the moral aids of the Spirit attached to the respective dispensations no doubt are absolutely necessary; they are implied in the very notion of the Father's traction; but these also are *mediate*, and are withheld from such as indolently wait for them.

It might be incorrect to assume, that all who encourage the notion of an inert reliance on immediate impressions from on high, maintain also the doctrine of absolute and arbitrary election. The two opinions are however related, and the passage I am

[n] John vi. 65.

about to produce has been thought to afford them a common support. "As many as were ordained "to eternal life believed[o]." Now the analogies both of Scripture language and of Scripture truth suggest, that this is one only of several passages which require a method of interpretation that shall stand clear of the error, on either side, to which, from partial or idiomatic expression, they may appear to lean; the error of explaining away, on the one hand, the divine superintendence and the moral cooperation of the Holy Spirit, without which all our endeavours must be fruitless; or on the other, the freedom of human agency, which would leave that *cooperation* without a proper object. It is important therefore to assert the fact of the existence of such passages; to evade it is not less unwise than incorrect; every instance of this kind, by affording additional exercise to the discriminative and moderating principle which such expressions require, contributes to its maintenance. Those, then, who insist on the reciprocal sense of τεταγμένος in this passage, should consider, that there must still be a reserve on behalf of the divine grace necessary to enable the Gentiles to place themselves in the proper and orderly state requisite to the reception of the Gospel, and an admission to its privileges. But it were as easy to make the like exception on behalf of our own cooperation; and it would be more advisable to do so, if of exceptions were a question, when, as in this case, the *passive* sense is the most obvious and natural, when therefore the meaning which some judge it necessary to contend for, can-

[o] Acts xiii. 48.

not be absolutely secured by its rejection. But the proper question is not of reserves or of partial interpretation, such as would only substitute one extreme for another. Instead of either insisting on the reciprocal sense of τεταγμένος, or leaving the passive sense unqualified, I would maintain simply, in so far as this particular term is concerned, what, according either to Greek or Hebrew idiom, is fully justified, that the notion of human cooperation is not excluded from it. Then, that this notion is actually here required, that it forms an essential part of the true meaning, I would leave to be determined by the general tenor of the text and context; by the contrast manifestly intended between the Jew, who "contradicted and blasphemed," who "put "away the word of God from him," and the Gentile, who "glorified that word," and rejoiced in the vocation of the heathen; by the invalidity (if an arbitrary, overruling interposition be supposed) of the reason assigned for the turning of Paul and Barnabas from those who had exercised and abused a liberty of choice to such as did not possess it; lastly, by that uniform conviction, of which no sound mind will allow itself to be dispossessed, and which the Scriptures themselves, when impartially and consistently understood, are fitted to establish, that a divine revelation cannot contradict the principles of the free and intelligent and responsible character which the Deity has bestowed; that what we have "learned" of his will through his natural and moral government, we cannot be required to unlearn through the dispensation of his Son. Proceeding upon these views we shall readily admit,

that certain means and opportunities of attaining to evidence, to truth, to the graces of the Holy Spirit, by which some of the Gentiles were actually brought into that appointed, that orderly state, which is requisite for admission to the benefits of the Gospel scheme, specifically the preparation they had enjoyed as proselytes of the gate to Judaism were supplied to them by "the Father," and through the dispensations under which they antecedently had lived; while yet as they were moral agents equally with the Jews or with their Gentile brethren, they might, like them, have forborne to cultivate these means, or to follow them up by a profession of the religion tendered to them. Such a sense of the passage suffices to rescue it out of the hands of those who would derive a pretext from it for inertness. It thus is seen, that even in the infancy of the Christian dispensation, and while for public ends extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit were as yet continued, occasions of belief, presented through the mean of an apostolic ministry, availed only in proportion to the degree of moral or religious training, in which those to whom such offers were made had previously been exercised; and the Jew and Gentile of Antioch are respectively a warning and an encouragement to those who neglect, and who diligently use, the means which, through whatever dispensation, are supplied of arriving at a salvable state. For, lastly, it was to this state, and not to eternal life itself, that as many as had been prepared by the concurrence of divine grace, with the exertions of their own free will, obtained admission by the act of believing. On their perseverance in

such a state would depend whether they should actually reach the happiness which the Gospel scheme proposed to them.

The last passage I purpose noticing under the head of error I am now considering, is that which follows: "The natural man receiveth not the "things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolish-"ness unto him: neither can he know them, be-"cause they are spiritually discerned[p]." This text is employed to support a distinction among Christians. Means, it is admitted, are prescribed indiscriminately; but with a secret reserve, it is assumed, on behalf of certain peculiarly favoured persons, to whom the Spirit manifests himself in a sense and measure which preclude their own exertions, and in which he communicates not with the mass of professing Christians. Now it would seem hardly possible that any one should read this second chapter with the attention to which the Scriptures are universally entitled, and not perceive that in what the apostle here attributes to certain spiritually endowed individuals, he is speaking of privileges which were confined, not merely to the early periods of Christianity, but to the persons of the apostles themselves. Any application, therefore, to ordinary persons and times of those parts of the chapter which may seem to exhibit the contrast to such privileges, must require, to say the least, extreme circumspection.

Accordingly, and in the first place, the senses which the word ψυχικὸς possesses in the four other

[p] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

places of the New Testament[q] where the term occurs, do away the distinction in question, forbid all application of the epithet to persons who have received baptismal regeneration.

Under this limitation three senses remain. First, that by the natural man is intended merely one to whom the doctrines of Christianity, in point of fact, have not been offered. In this case, it is certain, he cannot "know" them, reason being unequal to their discovery; but then, even were such the true sense of the passage, for the removal of this hitherto unavoidable ignorance there would be no need of recourse to other sources of conviction and of grace, than those which exist indiscriminately for all, through the Christian dispensation; nor where a due application to these was neglected, would the deficiency be supplied by immediate and extraordinary manifestations. This sense, however, seems inadmissible; for although the term δέχεται should not be judged to have here a more emphatic meaning than that of mere acquaintance with the Christian truth, it can hardly be affirmed that this truth is "foolishness" to one who never heard of it.

According to another interpretation of the passage, the apostle designs to speak of one who having as yet no other guide than the light of nature, becomes apprised of the existence of Christianity.

[q] In 1 Cor. xv. 44. the term occurs twice, and once in verse 46. In James iii. 15. and Jude 19, and in the text which I am here considering, it has a moral meaning, engrafted on the natural one. It is distinguished from σαρκικὸς, or one baptized, but who has little profited.

and even obtains a barren apprehension of its evidences and subject-matter, but is incapable of acquiring a saving knowledge, of giving it, as it respects himself, an adequate reception. In this sense no stress is laid on actual errors of the understanding or the conduct. The passage, however, in such an interpretation of it, would apply neither to the doctors of the Jewish Law, who were far removed from this state of nature, nor to the Gentiles, who notoriously had abused it; two descriptions of persons, nevertheless, whom in this epistle and elsewhere St. Paul appears to have had expressly in his mind when animadverting on those by whom the Gospel truths were rejected, Nor, in the next place, and in a more general view of the passage, would this sense be consonant to truth and to the Scriptures. Natural and moral verities, in proportion as they are duly apprehended and employed, are so far from incapacitating men from "coming to Christ," from an adequate knowledge and reception of his doctrine, that they are a mean by which the Father draws them. Common grace, opportunities of a lower sort, are afforded to all. These rightly used are so many steps towards the admission of the spiritual things of revelation. There will always indeed be a moral indisposition in our wills, in so far as it is not rectified by divine grace, to the embracing of a highly spiritual doctrine; but the unavoidable infirmity of our nature, and an indolent acquiescence in it, must not be confounded. To this last, assuredly the Christian dispensation extends not any offers; but it is to the very point of "helping" natural "infirmity," of fortifying human endeavours, of rendering available the industrious and persevering

use of the means of conviction and instruction within our reach, that the moral graces of the Holy Spirit specifically apply themselves.

The third and in truth only unexceptionable sense is, that the "natural man," be he Jew or heathen, is one who has admitted such prejudices into his understanding, or such habitual vices into his conduct, as at once unfit and indispose him for the reception of the pure and practical doctrines of Christianity. The Jew, who, would he but have adopted our Lord's recommendation of impartially studying his own Law, and comparing its predictions with what was passing before his eyes, might have discovered abundant evidence of our Saviour's mission, had already lent himself to the systematic corruption of his own religion, and had no mind to exchange that introductory dispensation for one whose character was still more spiritual. The Gentile philosopher, who, had he allowed to natural and moral truth their proper influence over his mind, would have found in these so many preparatives for a due acknowledgment of revelation; who, had he been duly nourished in the contemplation of the fair and good, would have discerned his moral anticipations to be abundantly realized, the aims of virtue to be encouraged, and its ends secured, by that union of duty and of interest which the Gospel scheme exhibits, was now become puffed up with the vain and erroneous conceptions of religion and of morals, which even amid the better instructed portion of the Gentile world were taking place of a sounder philosophy. How then should not the Gospel of the holy and humble Jesus, and the truth as

it subsisted in perfect purity in him, be " to the " Jew a stumblingblock" and to the heathen " fool- " ishness?" how not be " hid" from those who in these several ways were " lost?" It was not therefore in reference to any arbitrary distinction between persons who had in common partaken of the rite of baptism; it was not merely because the sound of the Gospel had never reached the ears of this ψυχικὸς, or " natural man;" it was not because he had hitherto " heard and learned of the Father" only through the means of natural religion or of Judaism; he was a fit subject in proportion as he had so heard and learned for the truths of the Gospel; nor was it from the absence of immediate and particular communications from on high that he was incapable of spiritual and saving knowledge. The natural man, in this text, is not merely one who, inheriting the nature of Adam, stands on that account opposed to the spiritual man, whether of ordinary or other periods; but he is one who has superinduced on original sin, actual corruption, and has allowed the concupiscible part of his nature to obtain the mastery over his conscience and understanding. The order of his mind being perverted, the subsisting methods of arriving at Christian truth, and of possessing himself of the Christian graces, are not employed. The defect is a wilful and a moral one. Thus it is not " given to him of the Fa- " ther," or through the introductory dispensations which the Father has provided, to " come," in a pertinent sense, " to Christ;" thus having " judged him- " self unworthy" of the benefits of the Gospel, and indolently yielding to this state of moral destitution, he is not " ordained to eternal life," has not

entered even on the course that leads to it; thus, and for so long a period as this inert and immoral condition lasts, "the natural man" is disabled from "knowing or receiving the things of the Spirit of "God;" disabled even in that ordinary sense in which every diligent and conscientious inquirer may at all periods "receive and know them."

III. The third and last general head of error to be distinctly noticed, is that of *instantaneous* and *sensible* inspiration; but here the time requires I should content myself with exhibiting certain general classes into which the various passages exposed to abuse may correctly be distributed.

1. The first class consists of places of Scripture, which, in a primary or proper sense, are applicable only to those inward assurances which the first Christians received, of their being in possession of certain spiritual gifts for the public purposes of the Gospel. And since individuals to whom, for those specific ends, supernatural endowments were committed, did not cease to be the objects of the ordinary and moral graces of the Spirit, requisite to their own salvation, passages are sometimes ranged under this head, whose application may be doubtful. Some of them will admit of a secondary and modified reference to the case of Christians generally; in others, such application must rest merely on verbal coincidence, is therefore altogether without authority, cannot, where doctrine is in question, be insisted on. But if this class of passages be exposed to misapplication, the remedy is also within reach. Those who, under cover of certain interpretations

of these parts of Scripture, lay claim to one portion of the extraordinary testimonies of the Spirit, to instantaneous and sensible assurances within themselves, may fitly be expected to realize that other portion also, with a view to which those inward assurances were bestowed, and to exhibit, as did the first Christians, outward and sensible signs for the conviction of their brethren. Till then, these passages, diverted from their proper sense or application, serve but to substantiate the errors of those who misemploy them.

2. A more serious abuse of Scripture marks a second class of passages; namely, those which regard the conversions to Christianity that took place under the ministry of our Lord and his apostles. These, it is urged, were on many occasions attended with sensible divine impressions, and were sudden. But when it is considered that the parties whom these conversions regard had been feeling their way amid the obscurity of heathenism, or were immersed in Jewish corruptions; that to the vast and permanent object of introducing a new and universal religion, miraculous and sometimes instantaneous appeals to the senses were appropriate and even necessary; and that any *religious* and *moral* changes, really possessing the same extraordinary characters, were appointments of Providence, destined to subserve the public purposes of the dispensation; the grounds of comparison between cases of this sort and those of baptized persons living under the established means of conviction and of moral grace, become extremely narrowed. In so far, however, as points of contact exist, they are of a nature to defeat the purpose for which passages of this descrip-

tion have often been adduced. For instance, although miracles directly exhibited to the outward senses were among the means employed, though they were productive on many occasions of religious acknowledgments, though by their express and absolute character they were fitted to accelerate the intellectual operations, still a reference must, however rapidly, have been made by the understanding from the power exhibited to the authority whence such acts proceeded. Further, the change which began by a profession of believing that Jesus was the Christ remained to be followed up by ulterior inquiry, by instruction through the regular mental process in all the various particulars of truth and duty which an acknowledgment of the Messias involves. The instance of the thief upon the cross, although dissimilar in its circumstances, is not essentially different from such cases. Properly, it supplies no precedent for the ordinary periods of the Gospel, nor is it proposed to us as such in Scripture. It is an event occurring under circumstances which are absolutely without a parallel. Yet incidentally it establishes the duty of preparation, of means, of humble hope, not sensible assurance, in order to conviction, to moral grace, and to salvation. No miracle appears to have been employed specifically for this man's conversion; and his language authorizes the belief, that he had previously acquainted himself with so much of our Lord's character, and of the prophecies concerning him, as to become satisfied of his innocence, of his title to the character of Messias, of his having the power[r] to bestow eternal life.

[r] This thief was apparently a Jew, and might have heard of the

He had to all appearance prepared himself both intellectually and morally in no common degree; since he could overcome the prejudices by which his countrymen generally were blinded; could recognise and openly admit the pretensions of the Messias at the moment of his deepest humiliation; could, with an express reference to these circumstances, acknowledge his own guilt, and exhort his companion to the like confession. On this suitable use of the means already supplied, measures of divine grace proportioned to so critical a moment may be supposed to have descended; to this use of them the actual promise of eternal life was no doubt conceded. In such promise, and not by sensible impulses, did this penitent malefactor receive the assurance, that his conversion, thus mediately and gradually induced, had been effectual.

3. A third class of passages under the same general head of error, regards the public testimonies afforded by the Holy Spirit to the mission of our Lord and his apostles; a witnessing which, in utter disregard of its proper character, has been employed on behalf of a sudden and sensible inward light imparted to individuals. No text perhaps has suffered more in these respects than the declaration of St. John[s], that "he that believeth on the Son of God "hath the witness in himself;" yet is there none which in its proper sense more directly enforces a dependence on gradual and external methods of conviction. The grounds on which the true believer

emphatic manner in which our Lord had laid claim to this distinction. See John vi. 27, 33, 39, 40, 44.

[s] 1 John v. 10.

was first convinced, he retains, says the apostle; he can at all times reproduce them to his own mind, with an ultimate reference to the veracity[t] of the Being who supplied them. It is possible certainly that the phrase, "hath the witness in himself," may involve an allusion to that inward assurance of the subsistence of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit within the individual, which accompanied the grant of them. In this case, the passage will be so far without any ordinary application, and will belong to the first of the classes now exhibited. But its main sense is plainly that of asserting the proper grounds of Christian belief, namely, the external evidences which God had afforded of the union of a divine and human nature in the person of Christ, a doctrine either part of which was by heretics of that period contested. The witness or evidence of this doctrine consisted in the attestations of the Spirit, who, as St. John emphatically insists, "is "truth;" for of truth as openly to be witnessed was here the question. The Spirit bore witness to our Lord's *divinity* through prophecy, through the various miracles which distinguished our Saviour's life and ministry, through that great doctrinal one, his resurrection, through the effusion of gifts on the day of Pentecost. Under the direction of the same Spirit, the water and blood, which were obtained in the natural way by piercing our Lord's side at his crucifixion, and which this same apostle has in his Gospel insisted on as a specific ground of belief, supplied the testimony to our Saviour's *humanity*, to the fact of his death, which sealed the truth of his doctrine.

[t] 1 John v. 10.

In their character, and in the manner of exhibiting them, these witnessings were public, were afforded in order to general contemporary conviction in the first place, and also in order to their forming thenceforward a part of the permanent evidences of Christianity. And so far is this or any parallel passage from authorizing the notion of especial instantaneous revelations imparted to individuals, that they suppose the proper test of a true belief to be the holding fast, the preserving within the mind, a constant recollection of that durable, satisfactory, and definitive "record," which, through the numerous divine attestations to Christianity, God has openly given to the world of the mission of his Son.

4. The fourth and last class consists of passages which regard indeed a particular internal testimony of the Spirit, and one not confined to the first ages; but then it is gradual, not instantaneous, and affords no test of its existence independently of the fruits. The Holy Spirit, in this view of his operations, witnesses not anew the truth of Christianity, creates not belief in a proper sense, supplies not to the mind either conviction or the materials of it; but he prepares the way for a due intellectual application to the evidences by his moral influences, and contributes to the moral results in which the sufficient employment of the mental faculties will have terminated. And in regard to our sense of his presence within us, this is reserved for the stages of a Christian progress, when a duly informed and honestly consulted conscience[u] authorizes confidence towards

[u] 1 John iii. 21, *heart* for *conscience; spirit* is used in the same sense, Rom. viii. 16. and 1 Cor. ii. 11.

God, and a self-application of the Christian hope; when we exhibit the fruits of our belief internally in the peaceable and orderly condition of which we there are conscious, externally in all "goodness, "righteousness, and truth." Then it is that the Spirit of God, in the fuller sense, "beareth witness "with our Spirit;" then may we be assured, and the consolatory graces of the same divine monitor will be at hand to fix in us the impression, that the assistance, without which we neither can have "good "desires," nor "bring the same to good effect," has been actually present[x].

Finally, although the texts, which, with some trespass, I fear, on your attention, the time has allowed of my producing, have been few in comparison with the number which must remain unnoticed, yet are they *leading* instances; so that to have asserted their proper sense has been to contribute to a correct understanding of many others; a purpose which the classification here established may also subserve. A broader and a deeper foundation, however, for the distinct and decisive refutation which error on this important topic requires, must be laid in the more comprehensive views of Scripture doctrine to be taken in the next discourse.

Meantime, that I may not come under the censure extorted from Origen by the conduct of those who in his time deduced absolute conclusions from insufficient premises, a practice which, where religious truth is concerned, supplies, both from its fre-

[x] John xiv. 23.

quency and its danger, a perpetual ground of caution, I confine myself to this qualified affirmation: that limited as the exhibition unavoidably has been of passages misinterpreted and set right, yet are their proper sense and tenor so contradictory to the notions attempted to be fastened on them, that the Scripture must be rendered inconsistent with itself, before any other character of the operations of the Holy Spirit in ordinary periods can be deduced from it, than that they are moral, mediate, gradual; that, far from authoritatively controuling the human mind, or sensibly manifesting their actual presence, they suppose an unreserved application of the intellect to the means of evidence, of truth, of grace, which the dispensation under which we live presents, and are discernible only in the progressive increase of the moral results.

SERMON IV.

1 John iv. 1.

Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.

THE mediate and gradual system by which the natural and moral governments of God are conducted, is manifestly adapted to the compound nature of man, and to the character of the human faculties; nor were it easy to understand how the connection of these with either dispensation could be maintained, if such correspondence were wanting. This adaptation however of our species to the situation it is appointed to occupy, and to the divine administration under which it habitually exists, is not decisive of the question, whether interruptions to such system have not occurred. The same views of the material and moral world which discover to us the relations it bears to ourselves, assure us of two other and ulterior truths; of the existence and attributes of the Deity, who may indisputably suspend the laws which he has himself appointed; and of the moral need of revelation, which supposes the interruption of a previously subsisting course of things, in order to its own authentication. Revelations then, even when viewed in reference to the system they infringe, are conceivable; they even derive facilities

from the customary order of the divine government, so long as they retain the character of exceptions. Presenting themselves oftener, and on a more extensive scale, or continuing longer than such a notion of them supposes, they fall into the class of ordinary or periodical occurrences: and their immediate and instantaneous character becomes thenceforward proportionably unavailing to the purposes which revelation[a] is designed to answer. The boundaries thus assigned to the occurrence and duration of divine interpositions, render probable beforehand the following conclusions:

I. First, that in the event of the Deity communicating directly with his rational and moral creatures, this departure from the general rules of the divine government would not be altogether without traces of the mediate and gradual appointments which it had interrupted.

II. Secondly, that an epoch would arrive, when all that was necessary for the express information of mankind, and for divinely authenticating what was revealed, having been imparted, there would be an absolute return to those principles of divine administration, by which the proceedings of the Deity,

[a] There is nothing in the history of the Jewish dispensation to contradict this principle. In proportion as under that scheme revelation was continuous, its present effects approached to those of the ordinary divine administration; but it was continuous for ulterior purposes. As the time approached for these being realized through another dispensation, which would require its own specific attestations, miracles and even prophecy ceased; so that on their re-appearance at the advent, they had recovered their proper character of *strangeness*.

in respect of mankind, had ordinarily been regulated.

Now, on an inquiry into the religious history of the world as exhibited to us in the Scriptures, these anticipations are seen to be verified.

I. For, first, the interpositions which in contradistinction to the ordinary government of God are denominated *immediate*, can by no means claim that character in every instance, and absolutely. They often involved the employment of means; both in this sense, that direct and instant communications were comparatively rare, means and gradations being for the most part, even in the first instance, intermixed with them; and also, in the further and more extensive understanding of the expression, that those to whom extraordinary manifestations, whether directly or otherwise, had been afforded, were usually intrusted with them in the express view of their becoming the *instruments* of making known what they had received to others. During the training of mankind for a more perfect dispensation, whether amid the frequent but detached revelations to the patriarchs, or the continuous interpositions and sensible signs of the divine presence, requisite to secure the subsistence of the true faith amid surrounding idolatry, the merely satisfying the understanding, and providing for the instruction of the individuals to whom the revelation was made, seldom if ever are seen to be the ultimate objects of the manifestation.

The original covenant with Adam (amid seem-

ingly habitual communications of the Deity with our first parents) included means. It was by the abuse of the moral trial they presented that Adam fell. Comparatively indeed with the subsequent legation of Moses, the divine revelations to the patriarchs were simple both in their form and substance; yet the commissions of Enoch and of Noah had for their object the affording a general warning to mankind of the evils which contingently awaited them. Still less did Abraham confine within his own breast the promised blessings. Isaac and Jacob equally with himself were enabled to pierce the veil of ages, and to behold and to intimate to others the gradual fulfilment of both the covenants which God had made with that patriarch. Nevertheless, the Jewish lawgiver it was, who, as a pre-eminent public instrument, prepared the way for the execution of the twofold promise by the calling of a whole people. The scheme thus divinely imparted through the mediation of Moses was essentially a system of means, and of means which *gradually* developed the purpose they were designed to serve: and not only amid whatever particular revelations, until the closing of the prophetic period, did this instrumentality, personal and other, in regard to the successive divine communications continue, and means accompany both prophecy and miracle, so that the one was rarely uttered, or the other performed without the introduction of them; but from that memorable interposition, when the voice of the Lord God was heard walking in the garden, or approaching gradually nearer to the offending pair for the purpose of announcing at once their doom and the projected alleviation of it, the intimations from on high, in-

dependently of the temporary and subordinate ends they might promote, were a gradation of means in order to an object without and beyond themselves, the accomplishment of that doctrinal event, whose own specific character was *mediatorial;* the actual advent of the one sufficient and final *intercessor*, whom the mean of sacrifices, of the offering of Isaac, of the law ordained through the ministry of angels, and in the hand of a human *mediator*, had prefigured or foretold; whom above all the schechinah had symbolically represented through a series of ages, and during the subsistence of the first temple, as that "Desire of nations," who by his presence should realize what had thus been typified, and fill the second house with a proper glory.

When the dispensation thus mediate and gradual, both in its character and in the mode of introducing it, appeared, it progressively established itself in a subordinate sense by means. How constant was the recourse to them of Him, in whom resided the Spirit without measure! who, in his habitual communion with the Deity, needed not on his own account any such intervention. Not only does the divine founder of our religion represent himself as the *instrument* of man's restoration, and of deriving from the Father and delivering to mankind both truth and evidence, but in the execution of these the specific objects of his mission, the features of his intercourse with mankind are essentially *mediate.* Under our Lord's direction, and by those extraordinary aids which he secured to them, (yet not altogether without means and gradations, even where those aids were most express and considerable,) the first teachers

of the Christian doctrine became, what supernaturally instructed persons had been under former dispensations, the *media* of divine communication to others; and became such with an ulterior view to an event which preceding revelations had been gradually bringing on, namely, the promulgation of such a measure of divinely authenticated truth, as might prove a permanent *medium* of knowledge and conviction to all succeeding ages.

II. Here then, in the second place, in proportion as the Scriptures of the New Testament, endited at the suggestion and under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, were taking place of the temporary mean of our Lord's and his apostles' ministry, the vast and progressive scheme of divine and human agency carried on from the fall, developed the permanent and exclusively mediate character to which it had been uniformly tending. Thenceforward the sacred writings became the sole authoritative depository of divine truth and attestation [b].

Revelation thus has borne the character, and has had the issue, which a contemplation of the general features of the divine government would lead us to expect. But we need not stop here. Of what has

[b] As revelation, so long as any of its truths still continued to be imparted, employed various means and instruments which now are merged in the one *medium* of divine truth and evidence, the Scriptures; so it preserved a *gradual* character, until by successive communications its primary object of an introduction to the world had been accomplished. Comprehensively viewed, however, the scheme of revelation still is *gradually* operating towards a final issue.

hitherto been contemplated as fact, the contents of revelation supply the reason; account even for the interpositions themselves whence this series of particular facts proceeded; evince that both have been pre-eminently dictated by moral considerations. We thus discern the intentions of the Deity in Adam's probation; that, duly sustained, it would have entitled him to higher degress of happiness, whilst it tended to secure his actual felicity; that evil therefore was incidental to our nature, not proper to it; and that the object of subsequent revelation was gradually to prepare for and to exhibit a remedy, such as this contingency required, and which reason could not supply. Now a scheme having such a purpose is seen, on the mere statement of it, to involve the interposition of a moral governor. At the same time the restoration intended was that of a creature so constituted as to be incapable amid whatever helps of attaining to that happiness which had been made the object of his desires, otherwise than through virtue, or to this, except through the exercise of his intellectual and moral powers. Hence, even amid revelation, the traces of a gradual and mediate system so requisite to this exercise, and an absolute resumption of the ordinary course of the divine government, so soon as the primary objects which revelation had to fulfil permitted. Hence so much of moral truth and nature, even amidst the most absolute predictions of the prophets, and the inspired narratives of the most signal miracles. Hence the distinct exhibition to mankind of such unmerited and voluntary sufferings on the part of the one proper mediator, as, while they fulfilled their doctrinal and sacrificial purpose, itself essentially a

moral one, might instil the horror of sin. Hence, as a most effectual *mean* of virtue, the spotless and complete example of it, and of its fundamental principles, obedience to the will of God, and universal charity, presented to our imitation, in the nature of which we participate; and hence the specific and moral character of the ordinary influences of the Spirit. More generally, the grounds of increased exertion, as well as the additional resources for it which Christianity introduced, were themselves of a character and were to be exhibited in a way the most appropriate to the constitution of the being whose restoration was designed; and when once the facts had taken place on which this dispensation essentially rested, the ordinary operations of the human mind were not thenceforward to be broken in upon by further truths and manifestations. What had been revealed was to become a proper moral trial of the intellect, by claiming to be received in each successive generation upon the strength of the evidence from on high already supplied[c], and through the purely mediate channel of human testimony.

If then the course of God's natural and moral government has been interrupted, and repeated communications from the Deity have been made to man; if, at the same time, these have so far assimilated themselves to the character of the ordinary divine administration as to become intermixed with means,

[c] That certain prophecies of holy writ are as yet unaccomplished, detracts not from the essential truth of this proposition. The predictions are already given, and mere human evidence, by testifying to the actual occurrence of the events foretold, will convert such predictions into divine attestations.

and subjected to gradations; if they superseded not, but only modified those other dispensations; if, lastly, they ceased with the subordinate and present occasions which were various, or altogether and at length with that ultimate and principal one, the establishment of the scheme to which they had been introductory; every part of this proceeding is seen to have been dictated by one common regard to moral purposes. The subject-matter of revelation at once confirms and enlarges the notions which our observation of the general divine economy, and of our own mental constitution, would suggest; the occasional suspensions of the ordinary moral administration of the Deity are perceived to have contributed by their character and their results to its more extensive exemplification; and by one and the same train of reasoning we are able to assert the expediency of a certain interruption of the established order of things, and of such interruptions having long since terminated.

And the same views of the divine proceedings which account for the cessation of all other spiritual communications, assure us of the continuance of the *moral* influences. The specific character belonging to *evidence* and to *truth* allowed of their being imparted from on high so fully and definitively, as to need at length no further additions; allowed also of a sufficient acquaintance with them through written documents. An accident it was that gave rise to this series of extraordinary manifestations; and the general character both of the divine government and of the human mind required they should be temporary. It is intelligible therefore, that from

the period when the Holy Spirit had committed the subject-matter of an ultimate dispensation, and his testimonies on its behalf, to Scripture, neither mediately nor otherwise would he continue to teach or to attest. But the *moral* aids of the same Spirit possess, both in themselves, and with relation to mankind, a distinct character. The need of them to our nature is essential, and can never cease ; an assurance of their having been antecedently and for a time imparted, could not suffice. Further, they are of a character to subserve, not interrupt the ordinary government of the Deity, and to coincide with the usual process of the human faculties. As the purposes which these influences promote were anterior to the fall, and to the specific revelations which that event occasioned, so they must ever be intimately present to him, who, as the nature he has bestowed upon us testifies, is essentially righteous, true, and good; must be the appropriate foundations of his intercourse with the being to whom such a nature has been imparted. Then the moral aids, which for the accomplishment of these purposes were always requisite to a finite creature, became indispensable to a lapsed one. For the evil induced by the fall, and originating in the predominance of will and appetite, had given such undue preponderance to the inferior qualities of the mind, and had so perverted in consequence its moral order, that truth or evidence would in vain have been provided for the intellect, so long as a moral bias still prevailed, by which the proper exercise of this faculty was hindered. These moral graces of the Spirit were afforded accordingly, to support the endeavours of the faithful under every preceding dispensation ; and Christianity, in develop-

ing a more extensive scheme of belief and practice, and in proposing its truths to the acceptance of the greater number through a species of proof involving in an especial degree a moral trial, appropriately supplied yet larger measures of them. The permanent character of these moral succours, the continual need of them to our deteriorated nature, the essential connection they have, not with that nature only, but with the principles and ultimate purpose of revelation, give them a pre-eminence over the extraordinary gifts of the same Spirit, and account for the subdued and comparatively disparaging tone in which these last are sometimes spoken of in the Scriptures. Thus, it was very possible, we find, that even those, who by immediate commission from above had become qualified on the moment to be the instruments of imparting doctrine or evidence to others, themselves might fall short of a faith sufficient to salvation; and our Lord, on a variety of occasions, appears to intimate the danger, and to regulate his conduct by the consideration, that testimonies designed to satisfy of the truth of Christianity throughout all succeeding ages of the church, and to procure for it an early and extensive reception from the world, might, in minds not suitably prepared, disturb, rather than assist, the proper process of belief; might excite some undue emotion and expectation; might overpower, instead of convincing, when addressed, as in the first instance they unavoidably must be, to the senses. It was only in proportion as the moral relation, which these extraordinary interpositions of the Spirit bore to those who experienced and those who witnessed them,

was actually recognised, that either party could derive assistance from them, in order to a saving faith. In this view, the communications thus divinely authenticated proved, in respect of the individuals to whom they had been imparted, what the Jewish Scriptures, as they successively appeared, were to those who lived under the Law, what the whole body of written revelation now is in respect of ourselves: they were *means;* as such, they appear indeed in an especial degree fitted to excite attention and inquiry; and the moral trial to which they subjected the intellect was on the whole confessedly inferior to that which the same authentications as presented to ourselves involve. Still their primary effects might be rested in; still, in so far as individual belief was concerned, they might be resisted or abused, still, in this respect, the evidence thus expressly and authoritatively delivered was not independent of the moral condition of the recipient; of the diligence and honesty with which these not less than other means were applied by him to the purposes of his own salvation. The ultimate importance of the extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit, even as they respected the individuals who lived amid them, was derived from their connection with a system, having a moral character, and dispensing the moral assistances of the same Spirit.

Whether, then, the question be of the ordinary and mediate government of God, or of the periods of its interruption, the moral graces of the Spirit have been uniformly requisite to individual belief; so that even amid supernatural revelation, prayer,

and the study of the sacred writings, as they then existed, were means prescribed and employed for the attainment of moral grace.

But is the proposition tenable, that grace of this description is absolutely and exclusively mediate? Are we prepared, it is sometimes invidiously asked, to tie down the Holy Spirit to means? This question, in whatever terms it may be stated, is substantially of great importance to the evidences, since without these graces the intellect cannot properly discharge its office in respect of truth and evidence, while at the same time, in proportion as means are set aside, all definite assurance of obtaining them is at an end.

In the first place, then, let it be considered, that under the Gospel dispensation one main purpose of moral grace is to bring home to individuals the contents of the sacred writings which the Holy Ghost at first inspired; and since these writings comprehend whatever is requisite to be believed and practised, instruct specifically in the nature and use of all the other means of grace with which the Christian religion is provided, it should seem, that when human testimony had authenticated the Scriptures themselves, the sufficiency of holy writ would extend not only to the shutting out all other *media* of moral grace than itself, and those which it points out, but to the destroying all probability of *immediate* communications of that character. As those appointed means cannot safely be neglected or misused, the grace be regarded as detached from the external act, or, again, from the faithful performance

of it; so from their number, their character, the weight assigned to them in the New Testament, it is hardly credible that these, the appointed means of moral impressions from on high, should in any instance be superseded.

2. More decisively, in the second place, it may be affirmed, that the *mediate* character of the ordinary graces of the Spirit is implied in the circumstance of their being *moral*. It was from considerations of this latter character, we have seen, that means were so largely introduced, even amid the express divine interferences necessary in the first instance to give authority to revelation; while the scheme itself thus ushered in was essentially mediatory. In fact, with that regular course of the mental operations which is indispensable to the freedom of moral agency, means are inseparably connected. What is immediate disturbs this course; and the irregularity primarily thus created must have subsided, and the ordinary process of the faculties have been resumed, in order to the operations of moral grace. For this prevents, works together with the human mind; supposes therefore, and has a constant reference to, the proper mental exercise; supposes an intellectual application to such specific means of religious knowledge as are within our reach. From an indolent and therefore immoral state of the mental powers, from minds which apply not to the appointed methods of grace, which, for instance, endeavour not to establish in themselves such dispositions as may hinder their praying "amiss," the Scriptures withhold these heavenly influences altogether; but with specific regard to man's moral character, they

promise to reward the act of volition by which the mind conscious of its need of help applies for it through the means which He, of whom cometh the help, has indicated.

But though, for the fuller elucidation of this interesting and greatly misapprehended topic, it has been thought right distinctly to combat the notion of *immediate* ordinary or moral grace, the very question, in fact, whether such grace operates invariably through means, is founded in an imperfect apprehension of the subject generally. It may suit the antiscriptural purpose of those whose fancies are conversant only with instantaneous and sensible impressions, to represent the moral influences of the Spirit as transient and desultory; but the state of grace, or the salvable condition in which every baptized person is supposed to live, is an uniform and orderly state, has a continual title to grace, obtains augmented supplies of it through a constant employment of means: whoever makes not good his baptismal privilege by an habitual recurrence to these means, remains without the grace that should renew him; whoever has the due recourse to them will never want it. Now this doctrine requires not our maintaining, that the graces consequent on this continual use of means, though imparted at the specific periods when means are resorted to, are then imparted exclusively; doubtless the Spirit of Wisdom supplies as he sees best, in respect of the *season*, as well as the measure, graces which are expressly designed for "help *in time of need*." At moments, therefore, when means are not actually in use, there may be illapses of moral grace into the minds of

such regenerated persons as are careful to maintain an habitual claim to it; while at the same time this admission affords no just pretext for divorcing the mean from the grace, the sign from the thing signified. Next, in the unregenerate state, and supposing always such a degree of cultivation of the faculties as allows of coming to God at all, occasions of some kind, under the natural and moral system of the Deity, are seldom wanting. These, be they ever so scanty, are primary and appointed means; for the use of these, ordinary grace will prepare; on the diligent employment of them, it will attend: whether the result shall be such as morals and religion would require, depends not merely on the individual being placed within reach of further instruction, but also on a certain readiness on his own part to admit and to concur with the invitation which is implied in the fact of means being afforded. The grace, no doubt, which first presented these means, and caused them to be noticed by the mind, must also give to its acts the quality of a "good will;" but much of Scripture fact and doctrine would cease to be intelligible, if a voluntary operation of the human mind, however imperfect, were not requisite to the process. "To him that hath shall be given;" and they, it would seem, are "without excuse," who, even amid the obscurity of heathenism, and in proportion to the means within their reach, "have not." The unregenerated person, who, in passive expectation of an impulse from above, should refuse to apply himself to the means and opportunities afforded, would, by that very act of resistance to the appointments of Providence, disqualify himself from receiving the grace he wished for.

And this view of the moral influences of the Spirit, which shews them to be *mediate*, and determines the specific sense in which they are so, evinces them to be also *gradual*, increasing in proportion as the faculties are called into action and are applied to the means afforded. For since the very nature of moral conduct requires that the mind, when its own responsibility is concerned, should proceed in its ordinary course, that is, by a *succession* of thoughts and acts, influences which are designed to assist this process must also be *successive*. The heavenly influences, we may be sure, are not poured in on the mind so suddenly as to disturb, or in such abundance as to supersede, its proper efforts. And in fact the ordinary state of grace, though an uniform and habitual one, is not represented in Scripture as stationary; there is a growth[d] in it; a constant tendency towards higher degrees of spiritual proficiency.

But now, impressions from above, bearing a moral character, and fulfilling their appropriate purpose in that mediate and gradual way which such a purpose, taken in connection with the character of our mental powers, is seen to require, must presumably be *imperceptible* to the mind which receives them. A state of grace, and proportionably therefore a state of preparation for it, consists, it has been already observed, in habitual help and direction, not in transient and irregular impulses; and the interruption which external influence *sensibly* imparted must give to the ordinary process of the human faculties could be compensated only by its operating as a

[d] 2 Thess. i. 3. 1 Pet. ii. 2. 2 Pet. iii. 18.

moral motive towards more intense exertion on the part of the mind which thus perceived itself to be assisted. But the very contrary effect to this would in reality be produced by an interference that was discernible. Not to be previously assured that God cooperates[c], might hinder even the attempt on our parts to "work;" and that "fear and trembling," that apprehension of not attaining to this grace, or of not rightly using it, which is fitted to animate our endeavours, might degenerate into a despondency which would preclude them. Again: not to be provided with a test by which any considerable degree of progress may be estimated, would also dispirit and retard: this assurance, therefore, and this test are furnished; but the perceiving in each instance that certain specific succours were actually bestowed, and from a quarter where uncontroulable authority is known to reside, could lead only to that indolent reliance on divine assistance, which is already produced in some minds by the bare imagination of such perceptions. As the case actually is, the desire to be satisfied in the only scriptural way, namely, by the fruits, what our faith and spiritual condition are, and whether the heavenly monitor does indeed habitually dwell within us, urges to a "forgetting of those things which are behind," and to a "reaching forth to those things which are be-"fore." For with us, as with an otherwise extraordinarily gifted apostle, the reference in regard to our spiritual proficiency is to the conscience; to the testimony which it bears of the internal operations

[c] "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; *for* "it is God which worketh in you." Phil. ii. 12, 13.

of the mind, and of the motives whence its external acts have proceeded.

In these two ways then, by an examination of specific texts of holy writ, and by reasoning from the character of the divine dispensations and of our own mental constitution, may the subject of spiritual influences be secured against the multiform and complex errors which have been engrafted on it. And these methods assist each other. For the ultimate question in regard to comprehensive religious views must be, whether they are in agreement with the sense and tenor of holy writ; whilst, on the other hand, the partial and incoherent meanings not unfrequently attached to the less definite parts of Scripture may be overruled by the analogies which a reference to the constitution of the human mind, which a general survey of the divine dispensations, and which even the Scriptures themselves, comprehensively and impartially viewed, will furnish.

And now, to sum up so much of the subject-matter presented for consideration in my introductory discourse as the three last sermons have embraced, and to apply it to the specific purposes for which it has been here discussed, it is plain, that in many instances religious evidence is so represented to the mind, as not to have its entire and proper bearings. And when the incorrect and inadequate employment of means of conviction is to be defended, by some the nature of faith is misrepresented, and the intellect is assumed to be inimical to its production, or to have in regard to it no proper functions. As substitutes, the suggestions of sentiment detached from

its proper connection with reason, or the prepossessions of the will, are insisted on; whilst, from the difficulties which such pretences create, one principal refuge is thought to exist in undistinguishing references to the graces of the Holy Spirit. My purpose then has been to undermine the very foundation of these errors. With this view, I have shewn in what the proper government of the mind and the essential character of faith consist; and to how large a part the intellect is entitled in the production of that virtue. At the same time, sentiment has been seen to have no proper connection with the discovery of truth; and a neutral state of the will to be most appropriate to the object of a sound and conscientious conviction.

The relation of the intellect to the other properties of the mind thus asserted in the second discourse, in the third the understanding has been contemplated with reference to the Holy Spirit. The proper determinate character of the doctrine of the divine influences, as exhibited in Scripture, and as illustrated by the constitution of the human mind, was dwelt on; and vague or positively unsound notions in regard to the nature of spiritual communications, the circumstances under which they may be expected, the test by which they are to be judged of, were replaced by scriptural representations (obtained from the very texts perverted) of the distinction between the extraordinary and other influences of the Spirit; of the moral character inherent in those which still continue to be imparted; of the necessity of a diligent application to the means of securing them; of their rendering themselves sen-

sible only in the fruits which their cooperation with the human mind may gradually have induced; and of their being, what indeed these several characters imply, resistible.

Still a doctrine so essential to the evidences of revelation, and so bound up with every part of the scheme itself, could not but admit of being established through views more systematic and comprehensive than a necessarily limited adduction of Scripture passages could supply. Accordingly the same conclusions have in the present discourse been arrived at through a different method; by reasoning upon grounds which the general divine economy, which our mental constitution, which the holy Scriptures, in entire agreement with those sources, have concurred to furnish. The moral considerations in which the scheme of revelation originated, and by which it is pervaded, thus become manifest; and the same reasons which account for immediate, instantaneous, overruling divine interpositions, such as in fact have taken place, assure us also, that when the object to which they had been directed was fulfilled by the promulgation of the Gospel, the disturbance they occasioned to God's ordinary government would cease. Thenceforward the written records, which a series of divine manifestations had provided, would claim to be regarded as the established and exclusive depository of truth and evidence; and all pretence of spiritual communications to the intellect, or to any other faculty in *these two respects*, would be superseded.

But the inspiration which dictated the Scriptures

of the New Testament, although thus ultimate and final in respect of manifestations from on high of truth or evidence, and in respect of *immediate* communications altogether, is seen to be preparatory to a system of purely moral divine influences. These, even as subsisting amid extraordinary interpositions of the Deity, preserved their distinct and proper character; they abound under a dispensation pre-eminently of grace, and are to be applied for through the peculiarly significant and efficacious means which that dispensation has provided. To the intellect they are necessary in order to the fortifying of its moral energy, and to the consolidating of its union with conscience. But indirectly they in a yet more important respect facilitate its purposes; for they emancipate the will from the undue bias which Adam's lapse entailed, and establish it in that neutral state and in that liberty of choice, which are the best preparatives for satisfactory conviction; they restrain the affections from opposing obstacles to the efficient discharge of the duties of the understanding, and reduce them to their just dependence upon reason and conscience. Gradually and insensibly they thus re-establish the appointed order of the mind, and render it fit for intellectual and moral action. Declamations on the corruption of human nature, which have for their object the depreciating what is termed a carnal reason, are in reality misdirected. The understanding, though concerned in Adam's fault, was not the primary or main agent; and as the will and affections bore the principal part in the original offence, so they still retain the strongest traces of it. The licence given to them in our own days, under cover of a motley revival of the

gnostic and the *pneumatic* pretensions, strikingly exemplifies the character of the mischief accruing to the human mind from the fall, evinces that the proper relations of its powers have been disturbed, and how exposed the intellect now is to become the prey of the subordinate mental qualities. To these, therefore, as the weaker and more directly peccant part, the Holy Spirit especially applies himself; and by so doing, restores the genuine freedom of the mind, and the just supremacy of the understanding.

And now may be distinctly perceived the systematic and complicated character of the offence committed against the doctrine of the Spirit, by its being employed to sanction a disturbance to the intellectual process in regard to the production of faith. For instead of interfering with the proper course of the human faculties, whether in respect of the nature of the proof through which conviction is to be sought, or of the conduct of the proof by the understanding, the offices of the Holy Spirit coincide with these, suppose the trial which religious proof implies, and assist the human mind towards sustaining it. At the outset, this divine Guide first promotes, and then, in order to his fuller cooperation, requires, that very order of the mind which is indispensable to the undisturbed exercise of the proper functions of the intellect. Not only therefore all claims of *direct* interference with the understanding from within the mind, such as were refuted on distinct grounds of reason in my second discourse, are also done away with by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, when contemplated as a Spirit of order; but all *indirect* interference with the intellect, in so far as it

would derive a sanction from this divine source, stands condemned on the same account; since it is claimed on behalf of a disorderly state of the mental faculties, such as the Holy Spirit can manifestly have no concern with. Still it may be important expressly to bring to bear on such pretences the results of the inquiries pursued throughout these two sermons, so as to give to them a fuller refutation.

1. And first, in regard to the *nature* of religious proof, there is no question, can be none upon the principles laid down in these discourses, of any additions from on high to the divine attestations long since definitively consigned to written documents; nor of an inert condition of the human intellect in regard to the documents themselves. These are tests of the fidelity and industry with which that faculty applies itself to its offices in respect of the appointed means; to the investigation and reception of facts no longer pressing on the senses, and facilitating[f] extraordinarily the process of conviction.

[f] This is perfectly consistent with what has in the present discourse been said of the danger to an adequate moral reception of religious truth, arising out of extraordinary attestations. Each mode of conviction, that which appeals to the senses, and that which only involves such appeals indirectly, has its advantages and its difficulties. Sensible proof has a greater tendency to excite attention and inquiry, and it facilitates to the morally disposed intellect the labour of investigation; but there is room for apprehension, lest, in regard to the mass of eye-witnesses, the objects designed by such manifestations be lost sight of amid primary and present effect. The conviction obtained independently of sensible proof promises to be more deliberate and more durable, and on the whole is equally satisfactory; but it supposes greater pains and fidelity, in order to its becoming equivalent to belief on sensible grounds.

For if the human mind, even when a passive instrument for receiving and conveying to others the proof and doctrine with which it had been miraculously supplied, was not discharged from the task of examination and inquiry in order to its own religious faith, a more considerable exercise of the intellect must for the same purposes be requisite when immediate divine communications are withdrawn, and probable evidence is the mean or species of proof through which belief is to be acquired. The *moral* graces of the Spirit are indeed always present with the diligent and honest inquirer; but they assist his labours, do not supersede them. *Now*, as in the periods of supernatural manifestation, they prepare for intellectual application and cooperate with it; but in the mediate and gradual and imperceptible manner which is characteristic of them; in a way not interruptive of the proper order of the mind, of the ascendency and employment of the intellect, of the freedom of mental action. Further: as by the constitution of the human mind, and the character and relations of its faculties, no internal substitute can be found for the specific functions of the intellect, and as the ordinary influences of the Spirit act in agreement with the mental character and process, sentiment and will, which by nature are unfitted to be the vehicles of conviction, do not become such supernaturally. The Holy Spirit neither applies himself to qualities of the mind unappropriate to his purpose, nor does he change their nature. Even, therefore, were truth and evidence still imparted directly from on high, now as heretofore, their correspondent object would be the intellect; but since the Spirit communicates not otherwise than morally, these his

graces must also forego their specific character, before they can be adduced to justify the pretence of conviction, produced by their specific operation upon whatever mental quality.

2. Next, if the question be of the *conduct* of religious proof, the offices of the Holy Spirit, commensurate as they are with all proper truth and evidence, comport not with a partial treatment of them. And first, the contributions of natural and moral truth to the evidences of revelation cannot be *depreciated* but at the expence of the doctrine of the Spirit. As certainly as moral graces from this high and holy source attend on those, who, under whatever dispensation, are "willing to do the Father's "will[g];" on the Gentiles, who directly or through the gate of Judaism are[h] prepared for the Gospel privileges; graces which the "natural man[i]" remains deprived of through his own apathy; so certainly a moral dispensation exists, sufficiently independent of revelation to be capable of becoming introductory to its evidences, and of contributing to them. Through "the Father," by yielding to his traction, by a diligent, conscientious use of the degrees of grace, as well as of truth and evidence, which (often through natural and moral notions only) "the Father" has seen it fitting to dispense, men "come to Christ," correctly and intelligently may "know of," or acknowledge, in proportion to their general civilization and mental culture, the Christian "doctrine"; are "ordained to eternal "life," "receive the things of the Spirit of God."

[g] John vii. 17. [h] Acts xiii. 48. [i] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

Again: men born under the light and graces of Christianity "come to the Father[k]" in a fuller sense and degree "by Christ." Having that general disposition to inform themselves of the will of God in whatever manner and degree made known, which our Lord inculcates, they learn to contemplate the positive manifestations of the Spirit as so many authentications[l] by the Father of his Son's mission; obtain fuller views of the ordinary administration of the Deity, which such manifestations suspend, and by consequence of a moral dispensation, through the Christian scheme, specifically through the knowledge it imparts of the character, as well as the existence of the offices of the Spirit. For thus, moral grace becomes contrasted in their minds with the immediate and instantaneous, the sensible and controuling character of the positive attestations of the divine witness; and the universal and perpetual subsistence of the former influences, when coupled with the limited extent and duration, and the actual ceasing of immediate and positive vouchsafements, and with the traces of a mediate and moral superintendence interspersed even among these, casts a broad and steady light on the general government of the Deity, and on the relations it maintains with the permanent character of revelation itself, and with our mental constitution; brings into view the proper moral features of them all. Thenceforward it is perceived that the moral graces of the Spirit, whether as they exercise over the Gentile world an influence unknown, or but indistinctly shadowed out

[k] John viii. 19. xiv. 6, 7.

[l] John iii. 33. viii. 19. xvi. 3. 1 John ii. 22, 23, 24.

to those on whom it is bestowed; or as they are employed in impressing on the human mind the public attestations of the same Spirit to the truth of revelation, or more fully as they assist every part of the mental process requisite to Christian belief, would be unintelligible, would be left without a mean of action, an object on which appropriately to operate, if a proper moral dispensation were not admitted, nor the nature of man contemplated as its appointed subject. Further: those graces, more especially in the degree of them attendant on express revelation, not only suppose in the being on whom they are bestowed faculties capable of apprehending the moral quality which distinguishes them, and a character on which they may suitably act, and to whose moral infirmities they may specifically apply themselves; but as the ulterior and manifestly requisite condition of divine cooperation, they suppose such faculties and character in exercise, suppose them not least engaged on the relations of moral truth to the evidences and contents of revelation. For truth of that description is especially fitted to call into action certain tendencies of the human mind, which in effect are correspondent to it; and with such truth the moral graces of the Spirit have plainly a direct affinity. In like manner, the *express attestations* of the Spirit afford additional insight into natural and into moral truth, and into its relations with revealed. They cannot be suitably appreciated, cannot even be sufficiently apprehended, where the intellect has not been previously exercised on the truths of natural theology and ethics. Omitting to establish the principles of these, the mind is without any orderly and correct introduction to the source

whence the divine testimonies to revelation claim to have proceeded, so as intelligently to recognise it as the fountain-head of truth and knowledge. These positive manifestations of the Spirit refer us to points external to revelation, and of which we are otherwise and antecedently supposed to be convinced; call upon us to exemplify our belief in preliminary truths, indispensable to a due reception of divine interpositions. The refusing to acknowledge the records of the mission of his Son is to "make God a liar[m];" to impugn a principle of which natural and moral data are sufficient to assure us, and which lies at the foundation of all direct communications from the Deity. Then, in ordinary periods of the Gospel, the same attestations involve a reference to *human* veracity, and to its ultimate basis in moral notions.

But now on this very ground that natural and moral truth, in a religious application of it, obtains a fuller elucidation through the doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit which Christianity unfolds, all *absolute unqualified* exhibitions of the nature of such truth, in its connection with revelation, stand condemned by the same doctrine. For first, the views which this doctrine presents of the moral graces of the Spirit, shew them indeed to possess a specific and uniform character, and to have in consequence an habitual affinity to the moral tendencies of the human mind, and a peculiar relation to moral truth, but then, as we have seen, it is to the human mind under due intellectual and moral government; and it is to such truth, correctly viewed and employed,

[m] 1 John v. 10.

not *inordinately magnified*, or forced unduly into connection with revelation. To claim a sanction for views of this last description from the temperate and orderly influences of the Spirit of truth, would be the consummation of a moral fanaticism. But secondly, the circumstance under which the moral graces of the Spirit have ever since the fall been imparted, is that of a deteriorated nature in the object on which they have to operate. Hence the design of such graces, even under other dispensations, has been to prepare the way for the restorative system of which a fallen nature had need; hence when actually operating under such system, they become modified in their application to mankind by the existence of a moral disease, and by the nature of its remedy; are imparted more fully indeed, but with a constant reference to the express and positive character of revelation and of the Christian scheme. As those representations therefore of natural and moral evidence cannot but be overstrained, which insist on it at the expence of the specific truths or evidences of Christianity; so they are discountenanced by accurate views of moral grace, one of whose purposes it is to bring home the positive attestations and doctrinal facts of revelation to the human mind, and to render them available to a true conviction.

And if exaggerated notions of natural and moral truth are incompatible with a correct apprehension of *moral* grace, equally are they refuted by the consideration of them in reference to the *positive testimonies* of the same Spirit. A previous conviction of the existence of the Deity, and of his attributes,

is indeed indispensable to that methodical and systematic admission of the express attestations to the revealed will of God, which the interests of religious truth require should be insisted on. Again: in ordinary periods is needed a similar acquaintance with the moral principle in which human veracity is founded; since on this depends the pertinent reception of the writings in which attestations, in the first instance afforded from on high, are by the Spirit himself recorded. But then of little avail would be this natural and moral preparation, unless we were further assured of what positive evidence alone can certify, namely, that the essentially veracious Deity has in fact directly revealed his will; that man, of whose veracity in certain cases no just doubt can be harboured, has supplied in sufficient abundance a discerning and honest testimony to the genuineness and authenticity of the written record. It is by allying themselves with proof of this *express* character, that natural and moral truths, while they enlarge the field of evidence, and impart a more intelligent character to what is properly positive, acquire in return such definite features as increase the value of their own contributions.

And, on the whole, the doctrine of divine grace, when adequately apprehended, secures a due reception of the method of religious proof, and an admission and correct appreciation both of the positive and the properly moral branches which constitute its substance; is seen effectually to dissipate such errors in all these respects as I have now been combating. Nor where the clear and determinate

views of which the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in relation to belief is thus plainly capable have been abandoned, do they fail of being vindicated by the manifest partiality and incoherence of the notions for which they are exchanged; by the ignorance which these betray of the character and order of our mental faculties, and of their relations to the general government of the Deity and to revealed truth; by the confusion they involve of the extraordinary gifts and manifestations of the Spirit with his ordinary graces, and of the periods of immediate divine communication with those of the purely mediate and moral system in which that temporary and incidental character has been merged. What wonder, if amid such distraction the point which more especially concerns ourselves is overlooked; if a "hope," full and ample "reasons" of which the human intellect, assisted by the ordinary moral influences of the Spirit, would be competent to establish, is made to rest on some one portion of the evidences; on positive truth exclusively or on moral; on the testimonies of the Spirit or on his graces? on these, confounded as though between them existed no proper distinction; disjoined as though they had no bond of union? What wonder, since error is progressive, if, in utter neglect of the functions of the intellect in regard to faith, and of the substance and method of the religious proof on which they should be exercised, that "hope" is ultimately the prey of mere illusion; of the facility with which the mind can transport itself from its appointed religious condition to an unnatural state, such as even the age of miracles has never autho-

rized; can exalt into immediate, instantaneous, and sensible impulses of the Spirit, communicative of truth, of evidence, and of moral grace, the irregular movements of a morbid sensibility and of ungoverned will and affection?

SERMON V.

ROMANS i. 18—21.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

IN the preceding discourses, all pretext of *direct* interference with the province of the intellect from within the mind, whether in respect of the method or the conduct of religious evidence, as also the *indirect* attempts from the same quarter to exercise an influence through the medium of the doctrine of the Spirit, have been examined and refuted. Nor can the instances of the like covert inference which still remain for consideration exempt themselves from a similar inquiry on the plea that their appeal is to the *intellect*. The functions of the understanding may as effectually be encroached upon under the veil of argument, as in any other way; and the very circumstance of such pretences addressing them-

selves to the reason must, if this faculty should decline the investigation of them, give undisturbed possession of the ground they occupy.

Suppose then an individual to have gone thus far with us in the present inquiry, and to have become satisfied of the duty of carefully excluding all interference with the understanding, where religious evidence is concerned; suppose him possessed also of the real character of spiritual aids, as coinciding with and as assisting the proper mental process; what is the method of proof which he will see reason to employ, in order to a sufficient conviction of the truth of Christianity? For, although the general appropriateness of the probable or *a posteriori* mode was dwelt on in my first discourse; yet since, in respect to the primary truths of religion, to those whence all the rest in certain respects essentially depend, the question has been repeatedly agitated, whether proper *demonstration* were not attainable, an inquirer will not be at liberty to pass over this point without regard, without endeavouring to arrive concerning it at some determinate conclusion. He will be aware, that minds of the greatest intellectual power are sometimes actuated by a fancy not less vigorous, and that the soundest reasoning may be exhibited in the conduct of proofs, whose foundations will not stand the test of an unbiassed scrutiny. At a certain period therefore of the discussion which such a topic has undergone, no undue presumption will attach to the endeavour finally to close it; to the exhibiting certain reasons as decisive of the inquiry, why not the stricter *a priori* argument alone, (for the application of this species of

proof to the fundamental verities of religion must surely be regarded as abandoned,) but why the ordinary synthetic mode, as directed to the obtaining of grounds for the primary truths of natural theology, has been and cannot be otherwise than unsuccessful.

And first it will occur to him, that these truths, although connected with others that are purely abstract, are facts. And if even mathematical axioms cannot supply a proper and sufficient basis for any conclusion concerning actual existences, yet less is this basis attainable through metaphysical assumptions, since these are far from possessing the self-evidence of proper axioms.

In the second place, therefore, he will ask himself, whether synthetic reasoning, when thus employed, does not indispensably involve a tacit appeal to the *a posteriori* method, and depend in the last resort on causation. Such reference of course is not intended, since it would detract from the claim of demonstration; but exclusively of it there appears such defect in the foundation, that even the principle of something having existed from all eternity, which has been thought to supply a proper metaphysical groundwork whence an argument of the same character might proceed, itself has need to be proved, and can be so only from actual existence, and by the causal argument.

Thirdly, some of the reasonings on these subjects will be found to have a mixed origin, one compounded of metaphysical and probable data; and

since the character of the conclusion must partake of that which belongs to any portion of the premises[a], nothing is gained towards the absolute demonstration wanted by such an union.

If the disposition indicated a few years since to revive in some unexplained combination the ideal argument of Descartes, and that which rests on certain conceptions of space and time, had been followed up, it would have been both seasonable and important in such case for an inquirer to examine what new claims to reception these severally exploded grounds of demonstration had acquired by being united. But this complex argument has not been produced. In common therefore with the numerous attempts which during the last two centuries have been made to apply the synthetic method in either form of it to the obtaining of a foundation on which to establish natural theology *a priori,* this question may fitly be left in the obscurity from which the public judgment has hardly raised, or to which it has successively devoted those other efforts.

Next, on the attempts to prove morality by demonstration, our inquirer will see no need to dwell, because he will distinctly perceive[b] why such endeavours must, in any pertinent sense, be unavailing; on what account it is that ethics, in any sufficient

[a] The youthful or otherwise less experienced reader will observe, that the question here is not of the strength of proof, but simply of the mode of it, or rather of the sort of foundation on which the proof of real existence must rest.

[b] See the notes to this Sermon.

understanding of the term, are absolutely indemonstrable.

Further, though the desire of carrying probable evidence beyond its limits, and the consequent confusion of it with demonstrative proof, appeared to require the transient notice which it obtained in the first discourse, yet argument will not be thought requisite to shew that probability, be the strength of it what it may, cannot exchange its own specific character for that of demonstration. The effect of such ill-directed endeavours must be, that by diverting the attention from the quarter in which the real force of religious proof resides, they render its proper claims the less discernible. Some of our older divines indeed apply, as did writers of profane antiquity, the term *demonstration* to moral proof; but the qualified sense intended in such employment of it is at the same time for the most part intimated.

Our inquirer, however, will not on these accounts hold himself at liberty to depreciate indiscriminately the application of the synthetic method to the subject of religion, or to encourage, as respects these very topics, the unintelligent cry which has been sometimes raised against it. The cause of truth, in itself a sacred one, demands the absence of prejudice and affection; the cause of *religious* truth, which is in an especial sense entitled to the same character, can, he will be aware, be only so maintained. He will perceive that this mode of proof, where the foundations of theological truth have been once secured, is not only available to the encountering of

objections which take their rise in abstract science; but that assuming such *a posteriori* proofs of the Deity and his attributes as the phenomena of creation present, it carries on this evidence into particulars to which moral proof would be inapplicable. Restrained to cases where a foundation has thus been otherwise obtained, metaphysical reasoning can have no such effect on religious evidence as lord Bacon apprehended from it in regard to natural philosophy; namely, the drawing off the attention from the inductive method, without, it may be added, affording in its stead so sure a groundwork.

But although, in what has here and in the introductory discourse been stated, the inquirer into the truth of religion may discern sufficient reasons for confining himself in regard of fundamental points to the probable mode of proof, yet is the decision of this point but an opening of his career. He still has to encounter, in the *conduct* of the method chosen, a severer trial of his diligence and fidelity. Unless by minds prepared to merge altogether the proper exercise of the understanding in systematic unbelief, or in the excesses of fanaticism, a field for the lesser qualities of the mind to expatiate in at the cost of the intellect would vainly be sought amid the positive divine attestations to revealed truth, or in its human testimonies; but it presents itself without the search in respect of the contributions which natural and moral data afford to the evidences for revelation; and so frequent and extensive has been the abuse, in these respects, of the latitude which probable proof presents, that the less

experienced inquirer, though grounded in the truths of ethics and of natural theology, is in danger of being bewildered amid contending systems.

With such theories and extremes he will think it right, no doubt, historically to be acquainted; but it cannot be amid these that he is to find the security of truth. What then is his resource? The actual adoption plainly of the principles which have in my second discourse been insisted on; the application to this subject of a mind, in which, as far as human influence is concerned, reason and conscience have the exclusive direction: for reason, while it contents itself with nothing less than a solid groundwork on which its arguments may be rested, will appreciate and adhere to such foundation when obtained; and conscience will keep the mind intent on the love of truth, as on the object which solely and specifically it should propose to itself; will render it regardless how far its views can be adapted to any of the preconceived systems, by which a full discussion or an equitable decision of the questions at issue on such subjects is superseded.

Taking the place then of such rational and honest inquirer, let us merge for a while the more immediate consideration of the several extremes of an insufficient or an overstrained estimate of natural and moral truth in the impartial examination;

First, What it is that constitutes the proper independent subsistence of truths of any sort:

Secondly, Whether the truths of natural theology

and ethics have a claim to such independent subsistence.

The footing on which these truths exist once determined, we shall be prepared to estimate rightly the specific character which belongs to them, and the nature and extent of the connection with revelation, of which the truths so established will properly be capable.

I. And in a popular but not unsuitable treatment of the first of these inquiries, the correct decision will be no other than that all truths have an independent existence which stand clear of assumptions, of references to authority, and of whatever else would interfere with their being by due course of argument induced from premises within the cognisance of reason, and which approve themselves to that faculty. Truths are relatively independent, when their premises and their process are essentially distinct from those of any given points with which they may subsequently be brought into connection. The question, in what way truths, which are of a character to become contributory to the establishing of others, have in the first instance become known to the human mind, or with what incidental assistance towards the actual inducing of their proper proofs the human faculties may at any time have been supplied, though it were from the quarter to which such contributions are to be offered, may, both as it respects the history of the human mind, and otherwise, have its utility; but the independent character of truths, which, when once made out, can appeal exclusively to reason for their foun-

dation and for their proof, are not affected by the issue, be it what it may, of such investigation.

II. And hence we may advantageously pass on to the second head of inquiry, whether the truths of which natural theology and ethics are composed have in effect such independent subsistence. For not only are these truths perceived to have a proper basis, and which introduces between them and the specific doctrines of revelation a clear line of demarcation, but on such basis they may be established by probable proof of a directer kind than the human testimony on which truths, when positively communicated, must more or less be grounded. For this basis is no other than the facts most intimately known to us; of our own existence, and of our being endowed with capacities for intellectual and moral action; points of which an inward sense, assisted by experience and observation, gives full assurance. The foundation therefore is as secure and permanent as the mental constitution of which we thus are conscious; and we ascend hence, through whatever gradations, to a source of what is thus ascertained to subsist within us, such as may satisfy the demands of causation, by being properly ultimate; to a Being who cannot but exist, although the principle of such underived existence we are without the means, perhaps without the faculties, for comprehending; to a Being who must be possessed, both intellectually and morally, of qualities transcending those which he has communicated to his creatures. A far greater security for these fundamental truths exists in the direction which reason is thus seen to take of an argument from effect to

cause, and in the developement by our faculties of the essential distinctions in which morality is founded, than if, as heretofore was supposed, these distinctions arose out of ideas implanted in the mind, and causation were the uniform suggestion of an undiscerning instinct. And when we have thus been supplied with a foundation for our reasonings from within ourselves, and when our faculties, by an appropriate and correct employment of them on this basis, have assured us of the existence of a First Cause, or of the distinctive principle of natural theology; have assured us of the essential moral differences, and of the relations in which we stand to God, which are the proper source of ethical obligation; in no instance is the argument from effect to cause more valid than in this, whether we regard the groundwork, the process, or the conclusion.

And yet, incongruous as the plea may seem on the part of advocates of revelation, by whom probable proof as such cannot consistently be disregarded, and who might therefore be expected to abstain from undervaluing this proof in one of its most decisive applications, it has from such quarters been argued, that even admitting the existence of a proper moral character as appertaining to our nature, (which some would fain deny, but on the reality of which it cannot be necessary argumentatively to insist before my present hearers,) yet consciousness, even when taking experience and reason to its aid, acquaints us with nothing more than the fact of our possessing the nature thus contended for; and its existence leaves us passive in regard to moral and religious truth, although it may assist our apprehension of it

when positively brought home to us, from external sources. Now, not to dwell on what would be foreign to my immediate purpose, namely, that conscience, or the self-application by the individual of some rule of right, however imperfectly apprehended, and the sense of approbation and its contrary, and of merit and demerit as attached to it, take effect to a certain degree, even in the least enlightened of our species, and excite more or less the mind to intellectual and moral action, let it be observed, that the objection is applicable only to attempts to derive religious or moral notices from innate ideas or instinctive impulses, such as are here discarded. The mental constitution of which by consciousness duly exercised we become assured, is so far from being here regarded as conveying through that inward sense truth of any kind, that it is not contemplated as the *subject* of science even, or in its connection with metaphysics, but simply as a *fact*, as a part of the effects of creation; as a portion of them, be it remarked, of whose existence we have at least as much reason to be satisfied through this internal sense, and through experience and observation, as through our outward senses we have grounds for being convinced of the existence of matter. But thenceforward, from the marks of power and goodness, of intelligence and design, of order and of harmony, which our mental frame exhibits, not only is reason authorized to ascend equally as from the other parts of creation to the existence of a powerful and wise and benevolent designer, but it ascends thence with especial advantage. While our proper constitution bears its proportion of testimony to such existence, the circumstance of our being so consti-

tuted as to apprehend in some measure those qualities, to discern their subsistence in the works of the Creator, to discriminate and approve in respect of them, conformably to an intellectual and moral standard which the exercise of our faculties supplies, of even giving to certain of our own acts some imperfect resemblance of those of the Deity; the possession of such a nature advances us to clearer conceptions of the character of Him who has bestowed it, and establishes an especial bond of connection between the moral and intelligent creature, and his Maker who has so distinguished him.

Further, though we should forbear to call the synthetic method to our aid for the purpose of establishing what even when metaphysically contemplated is hardly other than a purely negative conception, the *infinity* of the attributes, the method of probable proof will suffice to shew, that we are not at liberty to set any bounds, whether of perfection or of extent, to qualities, which, as displayed in our own frame and make, or more generally in the works of creation, convey impressions far transcending any distinct conceptions the human mind can form of limits within which they may be reduced, or of an adequate standard to which they may be adjusted.

Nor is the *Unity* of the Deity a point to be separately established in this way of reasoning; rather it may be regarded as essentially involved in the causal argument; for this requires, and therefore contents itself with but *One* First Cause, although if positive grounds should be desired for the exclusion

of others, they are derivable from the order and uniformity, and manifestly conspiring tendencies discernible in the creation. At the same time, a metaphysical argument from the underived perfection of the Deity will here find a proper place; will strengthen the conclusions of probable proof, by an argument of another character.

Next, the consciousness of intellectual and moral capacity, and the conviction which reason will on this foundation have induced of the attributes of the Deity, when united with the moral features which we thus become qualified for discovering amid the general government of God, are fitted to satisfy the mind, that what wisdom and goodness have concurred with power in producing, is maintained and superintended; and that a system is carrying on towards a final moral issue: in other words, the doctrine of *providence*, and of a *future state of retribution*, though not of that felicity which is the free and exclusive gift of revelation, are thus rendered probable.

Then, as in a theory of this character the notion of man's *free will* is included, so, independently of this freedom being essential to moral responsibility, our consciousness of actually possessing it supplies an evidence on its behalf sufficient to relieve us from the difficulties which the abstract question presents to our imperfect understandings. We may in consequence reject the proffered alternative, of either yielding to ingeniously devised and plausible trains of reasoning on behalf of the doctrine of ne-

cessity, or of distinctly and in every point replying to them.

A portion of the truths which have been here adduced may be obtained, no doubt, by a similar application of reason to the visible world; but it is on the basis of our intelligent and moral constitution that in some respects they are preferably erected. More generally, this is a foundation which the Deity has established within the mind itself, in order to a suitable apprehension and contemplation of Him. It is in the nature thus compounded, and in the truths deduced from it, that those who are deprived of the positive assurances of revelation have within their reach (what even we who enjoy these assurances may possess in happy alliance with them) a resource and refuge within themselves, amid the anomalies of the present scene; a preventive of the partial conclusions which in the absence of this habitual security such anomalies might dictate to an inquisitive and unguarded reason.

Natural theology and ethics then, however in fact made known to the human mind, have a proper distinct existence; and the simplicity of the proof is so far from diminishing in any degree its weight, or justifying the neglect with which it has been sometimes treated, that both its utility and its force are thus augmented. What the importance is to the subject of the evidences of asserting such independent existence of the truths in question, and what the consequent connection of those truths with revelation, will be seen hereafter. That part of the

subject which we have hitherto been contemplating cannot yet be dismissed from our consideration.

For although the validity of proof is not, strictly speaking, affected by the circumstance of truths satisfactorily established through process of reason having been originally communicated in an express and positive manner to the mind, nor by that of the human faculties having subsequently been aided by revelation in their induction, yet is there a point of view in which an inquiry into the nature and degree of the assistance received cannot altogether be declined. Theories, it has been seen, there are, which make no allowance for the moral capacities of the human mind, and would reduce religious and ethical truth to a merely positive foundation and origin. There are others, which though they admit the moral features of our mental constitution, refuse to it, nevertheless, the ability to acquire in any pertinent sense religious or ethical truth, otherwise than through the medium of revelation. In either instance, any spontaneous workings of the human mind in regard to such truths, any deduction of them by unassisted reason from our mental character, much more the *discovery* of any part of them, must, consistently with the maintenance of these theories, be denied to heathenism. Now although a proper discovery of the truths in question cannot be required, although revelation may have anticipated the ampler results of the exercise of reason, and the human mind, though neither destitute of a moral capacity, nor of a certain ability to evidence itself in action, may have been so circumstanced in regard to truths of this description, or

so deteriorated by the effects of the fall, as not to have had the means of acquiring any portion of them in an absolute sense, yet if the history of opinions, when diligently scrutinized, should be found to justify the presumption, that in some particular or other a discovery of truths here supposed to be so congenial to our nature must actually have been made, the fact is not to be neglected; whilst no small degree of original effort would attach to the human mind, if seen to be habitually employed, in proportion to its circumstances, in the developement and in the evidencing of these truths however discovered. At all events, and although our mental powers have become enfeebled since they first were given, it may be proper to obviate the supposition of their constant and entire inertness, in respect of the truths here contemplated through a series of ages, during which little positive religious knowledge was generally diffused, and amid various degrees of mental culture. For this would be a phenomenon, of which, if in reality it existed, some account might reasonably be expected. Nor when, as now, the proper subsistence of the truths themselves has in the first instance directly been maintained, and the question of the degree of aid which our faculties may have received towards their discovery or their proof presents itself as, what in reality it is, a subordinate one, can there be any danger of perpetuating the confusion of points essentially distinct, by the consideration of what these theories would object. And the views to be taken will, under such circumstances, be probably impartial; since no extreme of system is here dependent for its maintenance on the whole weight

being thrown into either balance. To the traditionary remnants of primitive revelation, to the indirect light of the Jewish Scriptures, to the direct and fuller beams of the Christian dispensation, may be ascribed whatever can even presumptively be claimed for them; while the proper efforts of the human mind, and the degree of success with which it can be shewn to have applied itself to moral and religious topics, need not on the other hand be kept out of sight, or be disparaged.

In the first place then, and as the question respects the more enlightened heathens whose opinions have by themselves or others been handed down to us, we may, antecedently to the inquiry in respect of any specific sources to which they were indebted, determine, that much proper effort and some successful results must have proceeded from themselves; and this, whether we consider,

1. The simple fact of the subjects of natural theology and ethics having been habitually agitated by them; or,

2. Their treatment of the topics discussed; or,

3. Lastly, the character of the imperfections with which their reasonings were attended.

1. And under the first head, not only the questions which on the supposition of the existence of a proper moral capacity most would interest, attracted in point of fact the regard of the heathen world, but they became the points on which their reason,

in proportion to its general progress, was mainly occupied. Hence arose the several sects, and the various differences and shades of difference in their opinions. Even the "disturbers of the old philo- "sophy," who denied all certainty to human knowledge, did not on this account the less inquire and dispute; and the topics which I have in this discourse been maintaining on the footing of reason, the existence and character of the Deity, providence, a future state, free-will, the principles of morals, in a word, the subject-matter of natural theology and ethics, as well as divers points connected with them, were perpetually discussed. Now from the circumstance singly taken, of so many cultivated minds being habitually and actively employed on these points, we should be authorized to infer that they had some proper hold on our nature; that this continual recurrence to them was an unequivocal indication of it, and that hence the impulse given to the mind proceeded.

2. The argument, however, will assume a more determinate form, if we contemplate, in the second place, the *treatment* which these topics experienced from the Greek philosophers; for to these, as having had the precedence in point of time, and as being the models whence the Romans copied, the inquiry of course must principally be directed. Now in the unqualified assertion sometimes made, that natural theology and ethics have a merely positive origin and foundation, it cannot surely be meant to include any such notion as, that either for the developement of truths which external sources might present, or for the reasonings in which the heathen indulged

concerning them, they were indebted to those sources. Even if historically or otherwise it could not be shewn that these truths owed much to the philosophy which entertained them, and was continually occupied in their discussion, yet is it not in the nature of things that such developement and such reasoning should have been handed down from early revelation. As little will the authoritative character and the positively communicated truths of the Jewish Scriptures authorize the supposition, that from this quarter discussions of religious and moral truth could directly or otherwise have been borrowed. At the same time, no inconsiderable degree of originality is involved in inquiries so various and so multiplied. Let some knowledge of the truths themselves have preceded any attempts towards the arriving at them by rational process; let such primary acquaintance with them have been the cause which excited the human mind to occupy itself in the proving of them, to expand the truths in question, and to illustrate them; yet thus to receive, to place in clearer lights, to render evident what the mind had not excogitated, implies a certain mental preparation for such truths, implies a principle of selection, implies certain grounds of judgment, implies both capacities and acquirements, which under circumstances still more favourable would have enabled the human mind to advance yet further. For instance; from the *effects* which the universe exhibits, and specifically from our mental constitution, the wisest of the ancient philosophers infer the existence of a primary and efficient Cause; an incorporeal and intelligent, an impassive and indivisible, an eternal and unchangeable Deity.

Further, they shew themselves aware of the inconsequence of forbearing so to reason; they are careful to disprove the notion of an infinite succession of causes; they distinctly, and with a view to this application of it, assert the principle of causality. Nor are their reasoning powers less successfully applied to the subject of the Attributes. From the power, the wisdom, the goodness apparent in the world, both Plato and Aristotle infer the absolute existence of those qualities in the one case in Him who formed it, in the other, in that eternal Cause of which the world was from eternity[c] an effect or a

[c] "Non ex singulis vocibus (says Cicero, Tusc. 5.) philosophi "spectandi sunt, sed ex perpetuitate et constantia:" and there is no writer who has more need of the benefit of this caution than Aristotle, scarcely a tenet of whose works has passed undisturbed. I purposely forbear anticipating any portion of the continuous views which the notes will present of his opinions; for it is by partial appeals that the extremes of indiscriminately vituperating and extolling the religious and moral attainments of the ancients have been upheld. My present purpose is simply to state, what in regard to his favourite tenet, the eternity of the world, I apprehend him to have *not* believed. This notion then was not inconsistent in his view with the general supremacy of the Deity, nor did it detach the world from its dependence on Him. Aristotle stands distinguished in both these respects from others, who held in appearance the same tenet. It would probably be correct to say, that he held not the world to be eternal as to its form, in the *same sense* in which in common with every other philosopher of antiquity he held it eternal as to its matter; that he considered the world as *produced* indeed, but in eternity, not in time; and then, though from the absence of any positive conception of eternity his notion is not a clear one, yet is it comparatively sheltered from objections. Inasmuch as the imputation of atheism is concerned, so far was the notion of the eternity of the world from implying it, in the view of profane antiquity, that, as Cudworth observes, those who denied the Deity, rejected the eternity of the

production. And as Aristotle maintains the existence of but *one* such cause, because one suffices to account for the phenomena which the things around us, which our own constitution, present; so Plato, with still greater accuracy, asserts the same Unity. Further: these philosophers concur in maintaining final causes; and the argument in which Plato (ill seconded, it must be confessed, in these respects by Aristotle) shews himself to be deeply impressed at once with the anomalies of God's moral government, and with its tendencies, the argument by which he connects the doctrine of a general and particular providence with that of the attributes, and this again with a state of retribution, bears marks, if not of his having arrived at these truths by the mere operations of his reason, yet of a proper originality on the part of himself or of some preceding philosopher in the proof of them. Then the Platonic topic ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοίου, though on the face of it metaphysical, and as such exhibiting the imperfections of much of this philosopher's reasoning of the same description, supposes an ultimate reference to the *a posteriori* method, and to the causal argument. As in regard to the truths antecedently adduced, this mode of proof conducts the mind from the excellencies displayed in the work to a divine artificer, in whom the [d] like qualities exist indefinitely; so the argument ἐξ ὁμοίου supposes the resemblance

world, believed in some sense or other that it was made or generated.

[d] It had been my primary intention to have considered in these discourses the question of the resemblance and analogy between the moral qualities of the Deity and our own; but it was unavoidably reserved for the Notes.

to have been verified, supposes it to have been so specifically in regard to the intellectual and moral qualities with which, considered as a part of that work, we are ourselves endued; makes it a ground for the duty of our imitating the divine perfections. And in effect the moral, not less than the intellectual character of the human mind was apprehended, was maintained, was on the subject of morals directly employed and put in action. In consequence, utility, civil or domestic, was not generally admitted to be the proper and adequate character of ethical truth; it found the place which in reality belongs to it as the concomitant of the "good" and "fair;" not as contributing essentially to constitute, yet less as qualified to supersede them. Even the Peripatetics, who would fain have administered some present helps to the infirmity of human virtue, preferred not the "agreeable" or the "useful" to the "honest;" held those external advantages with which they desired to surround the proper character of virtue to be of no account when disjoined from it. The sounder philosophers discerned the essential tendencies of virtue; the tendencies also of moral as distinguished from purely intellectual truth, towards the production of happiness. They saw the importance to virtue itself of moral action, and not of this alone; for the inquiry, "whether virtue could be taught," involved both the question of moral *science* itself, and of the character of the human mind, to which, after all, that science must be directed. The relation indeed between *ethics and natural theology* was less often and less systematically asserted than its importance required; but it was recognised; indeed the aptitude of the human mind to elicit the na-

tural and moral differences of good and evil being neither unperceived nor unemployed, the connection of physical and ethical with religious truth could not altogether remain unknown. And hence, or from the relative character of ethical truth, philosophy was carried on to its absolute and permanent one; to that everlasting law which subsists within the mind of the Deity himself, and of which his moral will is the expression. It was in ethics, as they more immediately concern *ourselves* however, that the talents of the writers of antiquity were principally displayed. In this favourite subject they expatiated to a degree inexplicable on any other hypothesis than that of its essential relations with our proper nature. In respect of topics of this description, that "least fanciful of men[e]," the "scribe "of nature[f]," may more especially be said to have "dipped his pen into the mind;" even here he has exhibited that averseness to imitation, that anxious desire of originality, by which his character was generally distinguished. Again, the Socratic mode of discussion, involving as it does habitual appeals to a groundwork within ourselves, must at all events have been primarily derived from proper mental effort; has nothing in common with the visionary arguings of Plato, when obviously proceeding upon extraneous hints, and already in possession of his conclusion, he is embarrassed in regard to the particular foundation on which he shall establish it. More generally, in the Ethics of Aristotle, as well

[e] "The least credulous or fanciful of men;" so Aristotle is termed by Barrow, vol. ii. 85. fol.

[f] Suidas in voc. Aristoteles.

as in the moral disquisitions of Socrates, especially if we receive these last at the hands of Xenophon, there is a peculiarity severally in the turn of thought not less than in the reasoning, a *raciness* which evinces these philosophers to be far other than the mere retailers of subject-matter handed down to them; evinces, that these truths both possess and were ascertained by them to have a proper connection with the human character; that hence arose the facilities and the motive for original effort to their mental powers.

Further: the natural indications which our constitution affords of the immaterial character and immortal destination of the soul did not pass unobserved. Not merely in order to the metaphysical arguments to which such indications lead, but also with a moral purpose, these have largely, though with great inequalities in the reasoning, been insisted on by Plato, while the tenets themselves of an immortal soul, and of a state of retribution, had long subsisted on the consentient foundations of traditionary revelation, and of those "admonitions "of nature," which the moral action of the mind supplies. Nor was the character of divinity, when attributed to the soul, or the notion of its ultimate union with the Deity, exclusive, as sometimes has been pretended, of the personality and consciousness which are indispensable to the notion of reward, to the retention in another life of the qualities and habits which had here belonged to it.

Then the doctrine of fate, as held by profane antiquity, and which in the stricter sense is manifestly

irreconcileable with morals and with natural theology, is not to be confounded in every case with the tenet of necessity. By some philosophers at least, perhaps even by Aristotle, on a consistent view of his writings, fate meant nothing more than the laws and appointments of the Deity ; and by Plato man's free will was so distinctly held, that to the abuse of it he referred the existence of moral evil.

And as the hints of religious and moral truth, from whatever quarter obtained, were by proper mental power thus unfolded, so in proportion as the efforts of the philosopher carried him beyond the limits of the notices afforded, he is entitled of course to the character of originality. Now, both in Plato and in Aristotle we behold the human mind laboriously and by slow degrees attaining to a perception of ultimate difficulties which it surveys, on all sides, with which it contends, which sometimes and in part it vanquishes. In Aristotle, who less readily deferred either to tradition or to the opinions of those who had preceded him, the process is more marked, and the results bearing a proper religious character comparatively few ; but it is hardly possible, I apprehend, dispassionately to study the works of either philosopher, without perceiving that their trains of reasoning in regard to truths however acquired must unavoidably have augmented the previously subsisting stock of correct religious and moral notions of profane antiquity ; that in respect of certain metaphysical truths, Plato has actually prepared the way for modern improvements.

Even then although the acknowledgments by

these philosophers of assistance from tradition could so be construed as to have no application to the discoveries of their predecessors, or to those common notions which must sometimes have spontaneously presented themselves to the human mind during antecedent ages; even though such acknowledgments had exclusively respect to primary revelation, and to a light imparted directly or otherwise from Judaism; further, though they were admitted to embrace the seminal principles of every religious and moral notion which the writings of heathen philosophy in effect contain; still further, although the philosophers had not been of all men the least likely to rest in mere tradition, and Plato, who the most employed it, could not be shewn to have exercised both discretion as to the source, and discrimination as to the substance of what was thus delivered; yet even then these references to assistance from without the mind would be far indeed from excluding much original and successful mental effort; and such efforts oppose an insurmountable obstacle to the theories that would deprive religious and moral truth of a specific foundation in our mental constitution, or deny to the human mind the power of in some sort building on it. They even suffice to render probable what in the former part of this discourse has actually been exemplified, that under circumstances still more [f] favourable to such an issue, the connection in question, and the capacity of the human mind for tracing and for employing it, might be fully evidenced.

[f] With the aid that is of revelation towards inducing a proof which yet when induced is, both as to premises and process, independent.

But, independently of any purpose still more distinctly to refute those theories, the truth requires that we rest not here; that in one main and specific instance, at the least, we claim for the mental faculties under heathenism the province of religious discovery. When the tenets conveyed by primitive tradition were fading away from before the eye of reason; when the distinction between the one supreme Deity and a host of celestial and earthly, of invisible and sensible objects of worship, was lost amid the homage paid by the mass of mankind to the creature and to images, the Ionic philosophy, after struggling long with the materialism from which no contemporary sect appears effectually to have extricated itself, was able to pass on by argument[s] from purely physical grounds to metaphysical, from a material and passive Deity to one detached from matter, and efficient. The recovery of this primary truth of original revelation was followed up, as might be expected, by an explicit assertion of Providence and a future state, such as opened the way to the reasonings of Plato, and in some degree also to those of Aristotle, although the Ionic sect had arrived at greater religious proficiency in one main respect than either; at the point of rejecting that planetary worship which Plato himself could not abandon. That these truths co-existed in a far higher degree of purity in the Hebrew scriptures is indubitable; that they might still be lying enveloped amid the corruptions of Egypt and Chaldea, or have been in some degree revived in those countries on the occa-

[s] In the hands of Hermotimus and Anaxagoras. Thales, a century before, had reached no further than to the union of intelligence with matter.

sion of the Jewish dispersions, is not improbable; but no traces are there of any communications hence to these philosophers of the Ionic sect, whose history meantime exhibits a tardy and gradual and painful progress towards the truth which was in the end attained by them.

3. But, in the third place, a greater degree of original effort than my argument would absolutely require, may be inferred from the very *imperfections* with which the reasonings of the ancients, in regard to the principal truths of natural theology, were accompanied. In the absence of such clear and positive communications as might satisfy the doubts of human reason, or of authoritative sanctions which might repress them, ancient philosophy presents at first sight little more than numerous differing and even contradictory tenets, such as supply to writers of a superficial character plausible grounds enough for disputing the reality of heathen acquirements. Even on that nearer and fuller view to which the conscientious inquirer after truth will hold himself engaged, the imperfections and discordances in question by no means vanish; but they are seen to be those to which the human mind, after arriving at a certain stage in its progress towards accurate and coherent notions, would find itself exposed, in proportion as it was left to the direction of its own reason.

And first, whatever may be pretended in respect of an ultimate reference in every case to the Supreme Being, as to him on whom the supposititious and inferior divine intelligences were regarded as dependent, yet cannot the notion of a proper *Unity*

be reconciled with the admission of such intelligences, and of their claims, however subordinate and qualified, to divine honours. And in fact the tenet of the Unity only obtained so far as to exclude an equal Deity.

Next, although the doctrine of an intelligent First Cause, distinct from matter, appears to have been recovered by the efforts of reason, and to have been maintained by successive philosophers upon the same foundation, and although this doctrine involved the *inertness* of matter itself, supposed it to have received both its impulse and its order and disposition from the power and wisdom of the Deity, yet was the notion of his Supremacy essentially detracted from by the inability to conceive of matter as contingently existing, and by the consequent denial, virtual or other, of his proper character as a Creator; of his being, in an unqualified sense, the Maker of the universe. However undesignedly, in some instances, a principle independent of the Deity was thus in fact established, which led at a subsequent period to the Manichean error, and introduced confusion meantime into the views which the ancients took of other principal tenets of natural theology; involved altogether the philosophers in a maze of visionary expedients and of inconsistencies.

Thus the argument on behalf of Providence, or a preserving power, from the attributes of a Deity who was supposed to have only formed the world, who had even to contend with a renitency in the matter which composed it, has plainly no longer the force of one deduced from the fact of a proper crea-

tion; from the attributes of Him, to whom all existence is obedient, and who also calls into being the things that are not.

Thus again: careful as were the wiser philosophers to remove the notion of all imperfection from the Deity; alive as was Plato in particular to the portentous error of ascribing to Him the origin of evil; anxious even as this philosopher shews himself to inculcate the contrary truth, that neither natural nor moral evil, properly deserving of that character, was to be imputed to the Divinity, that goodness had been the motive to the production of the universe, and that from the Supreme Being what was good and right could alone proceed; yet the degree of influence attributed to the supposed obliquity of matter, in respect of natural evil, implies something more on the part of the Deity than a mere permission of such evil, in order to ultimately beneficial and wise purposes; implies a want of power or of goodness in not controuling it. Nor, though the abuse of human liberty was assigned by Plato as the cause of *moral* evil, can the general resistance of matter to the divine will, and the consequent diminution of the proper supremacy of the Deity, be regarded as without considerable bearings upon morals.

The same notion of the perversity of a stubborn matter hindered philosophy from adopting the popular truth of the human body having its part in the retribution of a future life; and the prospect of this state lost much of its proper moral influence by not being contemplated as final.

The like inconsistency and incompleteness, and, as connected with them, actually impure and immoral notions on certain points, are discernible amid the details of heathen ethics; and they proceeded mainly from one of the theoretical errors which have been now insisted on; namely, an inadequate apprehension of the attributes of the one supreme and only Deity, and an insufficient reference to this source of the principles of truth and duty.

It were easy almost indefinitely to increase the catalogue of these deficiencies. Few indeed were the points, either of natural theology or ethics, in regard to which any one philosopher was consistent; in regard to which, sects, as well as individual members of them, were not at variance both with themselves and others.

But now in the character of the errors which thus impeded the endeavours of the human mind to elicit for itself religious and moral truth, we may discover the absence of any such assistance from without, as is sometimes gratuitously lent to heathenism. The failures are of that description which reason, unsupported in any available sense, would exhibit, and which a subsisting and still intelligent tradition from primary revelation, or a communication, direct or other, with the Jewish Scriptures, must have obviated. The proper unity of the Deity, the creation[h]

[h] It is hardly to be believed that any considerable intercourse with the Jews should have been unaccompanied by some notice of their manner of life and of their observance of the sabbath; and a very slight inquiry into the cause of this remarkable institution would have disclosed to heathenism the fact of a proper cre-

of matter, the history of the fall, distinctly apprehended, would have sufficed to remove the very foundations of many errors.

Nor are these deficiencies of the ancients to be attributed, in a general view, to *design* and *insincerity*. In regard to the popular creed, the philosophers, it is true, sometimes allowed themselves to dissemble, though in certain instances they believed in point of fact the same truths which the polluted stream of tradition was indistinctly seen to bring with it, and occasionally also those essential errors which floated on its surface. But in respect of their own exoteric doctrines, they claimed no such latitude. The main distinctions between these and their esoteric opinions regarded sometimes an abstract or a loose and popular method; sometimes the persons to whom these sentiments were severally delivered; sometimes also the subject-matter; but had not respect in any case to inconsistent representations, esoterically and otherwise, of the *same* truths. Between the popular and other treatises of Aristotle, against whom this charge has been especially directed, there appears to have existed no other difference than such as was occasioned by the discriminative treatment which the respective conditions of various descriptions of hearers would require, or an honest prudence may have dictated; while the general impression which the stile and method of so much of his writings as remain are fitted to convey, is that of his having communicated to others the undisguised and the elaborate conclusions of his own un-

ation, which, though not necessarily implied in the first verse of Genesis, was yet a point of Hebrew belief.

derstanding. It is true, we are deprived of a part of his works, in which, more fully and specifically than in those handed down to us, his sentiments on properly religious topics would seem to have been developed; but those which we possess are apparently esoteric; and there is no reason to believe that any opinion which this great philosopher entertained upon the points they treat of has been designedly withheld. Of Plato and of Socrates, the sincerity has less been questioned; by the demon of this last philosopher was intended probably that celestial principle of reason within the mind of man, of which Plato has otherwise discoursed, and which, as having been discerped from the divine mind, possessed, as was assumed, a character essentially corresponding with its origin. Then the sacrifice to the gods of his country, ordered by Socrates before his expiration, is an evidence, not of his disbelieving at that trying moment what he had been all his life maintaining, nor of his having till then maintained it insincerely, but of that inconsistency by which the philosophical creed was generally infected. That Cicero, who has done little more than expand the philosophical notions of those who preceded him, did not honestly believe the tenets which with so much skill he selected from the mass within his reach, is hardly to be credited, though the question, as it respects a philosopher of this later date, is here of little moment. In truth, the proper belief of the ancients turned far less on their sincerity than on the degree of confidence they were able to place in their own conclusions. Scarcely any point was there of natural theology or ethics, of which they do not appear

to have possessed some conception; scarcely any was there on which they at the same time felt themselves at liberty to pronounce in a determinate and absolute sense. In every instance were wanting those fuller and more accurate notions, those enlarged and connected views of the character of the Deity, and of the natural and moral dispensations as proceeding from him, which express revelation has supplied; in the absence of them particular points could not definitively and with a sufficient understanding of them be established, nor be fixed within their respective limits, nor be brought into agreement. Then, and in the last place, for truths of such a nature and of such importance, *sanctions* were also requisite. Now it was a proof of the discernment of ancient philosophy, and of the progress made by it, that it had become sensible of these imperfections, and of its inability to supply them; and the complaints to which this sense of things gave occasion, the distrust which habitually pervaded the various systems, (not those systems only which involved a profession of distrusting,) the liberties the philosophers allowed themselves in regard to subject-matter traditionally imparted, are indications that, amid repeated references to the East as a primary source of knowledge, and to the παλαιοὶ and ἱεροὶ λόγοι of Greece, or of some other country, they did not consider truth as deriving to them from these quarters so absolutely, and on any such authority as might satisfy them of its proper character, and claim from them an implicit assent and reception.

But on the whole, even though the probabilities

which have been now adduced could be distinctly shewn not to extend to positive discovery, and religious and ethical truth were seen to have owed altogether and in every instance its introduction into the world to primary or subsequent revelation, yet would not the writings of the heathen world be divested of considerable originality in illustrating and bringing to proof the truths imparted. Even thus much however is not essential to my argument. It is only as the powers of the human mind can be proved to have remained entirely passive in respect of this knowledge, whencesoever and under whatever circumstances obtained; it is only as Greece and Rome, the most civilized nations of heathenism, while abounding in displays of mental effort of every other description, forbore to occupy their minds with religious and moral inquiry, or to assign to it the distinguished place which in effect is due to it, that a difficulty can present itself, of which, consistently with the foundation that here is claimed for truths of these descriptions in our proper nature, and with the capacity of more or less inducing them, the solution might not be obvious. The history, however, of the first of these countries, (of the country prior in civilization,) of its progressive advancement in arts and learning, of its equally gradual improvement in the theories of religion and morals, excludes, to say no more, the supposition of any such inertness. Here therefore, as far as the mental operations when contemplated amid great general cultivation are concerned, the argument, strictly speaking, might close. For I am not contending on behalf of the *sufficiency* of religious and moral notions, which, even had they

been more perfect and coherent than here they are seen to be, would still but have evinced the defectiveness of our present mental powers in the apprehension and reception of such truth, and must have been without a tendency to supply the need of revelation. My purpose is simply to maintain, what facts are seen abundantly to justify, that the same faculties which with the aid of clearer light have enabled us to do justice to the principles of natural theology and ethics, and to maintain them on their own specific grounds, were actually applied to those subjects by the wiser and abler portion of the heathen philosophers; and that (on a very moderate estimate of the attainments of Gentilism) they were employed on them in such a sense and degree as, on the supposition of those principles being in fact derivable from our nature, the theory of the human mind would prepare us for expecting.

But though the assumption, that mankind have been the mere passive recipients of religious or moral notions, as positively communicated, is in consequence proportionably refuted, yet on a topic which the intrusion of gratuitous theories has raised to a degree of importance that would not otherwise have belonged to it, the demands of truth, even in so far as the application of the argument to the *more enlightened* heathen is concerned, can hardly thus be satisfied. After contemplating, as I now have done, the attainments of philosophy itself, it still remains to take a discriminative view of the specific sources whence external assistance may actually have been derived to it. Next, the present inquiry has need to be extended in a degree propor-

tioned to their respective circumstances to two other classes of mankind; I mean the mass of population as it existed in the civilized countries of heathenism and under the vulgar system of religion, and the like mass as heretofore or still subsisting amid less degrees of civilization and the common superstitions of heathen ignorance. Nor can this inquiry be suitably closed without some notice of the bearings of express revelation on the moral and religious attainments of our species.

Such then will be the object of the next discourse, in which the sense of my text, and of certain other passages of Scripture, will also be considered; for though I have forborne to introduce the authority or the language of holy writ amid discussions of the tenets of religion and morals as held by profane antiquity, yet may they be seasonably adduced to illustrate and confirm the fact of an independent existence of those truths, and of the consequent relations which the heathen held with them.

Meantime, both as a conclusion to so much of this inquiry as already has been pursued, and as preparatory to its continuation, let it be borne in mind, that the data on either part of the secondary and incidental question now agitating, whether it be that of the success with which the proper efforts of the human intellect in its application to religious and moral truth have been attended, or that of the assistance derived to the heathen world from extrinsic sources, are insufficient to justify theories that are exclusive. But short of these extremes considerable latitude of opinion may be claimed, on ac-

count of the doubts inseparable from an inquiry into dark or distant periods, the difficulty of placing ourselves in the exact position of those on whom the light of revelation has not directly shone, or of accurately estimating the advantages which from this quarter have accrued to ourselves, and have contributed to the formation of our habits of thought and reasoning. And those only amid such allowable pleas for gradations in opinion may we reasonably affirm to be in error on these topics, who decide upon them for themselves or others absolutely and dogmatically.

SERMON VI.

ROMANS i. 18—21.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

SO moderate is the character of truth, and so difficult the attaining by mere force of reason to correct and sufficient views of it, that few are the points on which it can be safe for the human mind to insist without reserve and qualification. The contrary notion however concurs with specific prejudices and partialities to hinder the establishment of a proper measure in the mind; and by theories maintained in an universal or an indefinite sense, truth becomes exaggerated or depressed, till its proper features are no longer cognisable.

In no instance is this observation more exactly

verified than in that of the opinions prevalent within the pale of Christianity in respect of the sources whence previously to the Advent religious and moral light was derived to the Gentiles. Under cover of a fact which all parties equally admit, (however they may differ as to the extent of the deterioration that ensued from it,) the proper constitution of the human mind and the specific character of its faculties are excluded from the question; and the only means, it is assumed, which the heathen possessed of arriving at the knowledge of religious, and even of moral truth, were the traditions of early revelation, aided by communications more or less direct from the Jewish Scriptures. Nor is this all: as until about the middle of the last century, continental theologians there were, who successively interpreted the universality which holy writ ascribes to the Christian scheme, not of its principle only, or of its character, or of the fact of a very general extension primarily, and a yet fuller one which ultimately may be looked for, but in the sense of this religion having been virtually offered to the acceptance of every human being, so it has been thought advisable, even in more recent periods, to attempt the establishment of the proposition, that such positive dispensations of revealed truth as existed antecedently to the coming of Christ, constituted an universal and continuous provision of instruction, religious and moral, for the heathen, throughout the long succession of ages, from the dispersion at Babel to the Advent; a provision, it is assumed, not incommensurate on the whole with the circumstances and wants of mankind, and adapted to a supposed inability on their parts to think in any degree religiously or morally without such

aids. Then those who live under revelation are of course represented as equally destitute of the same ability; and their acquirements in these respects are indiscriminately referred to the fuller and clearer manifestations of religious and moral truth which Christianity has supplied. If it be asked, in what way a theory thus exclusive, and designed to be so, of the operations of our intelligent and moral capacities on these subjects is held in consistency with what is known of the nature and history of tradition, and of the limited sphere of influence to which the Jewish Scriptures were till a certain period confined; in consistency further with what the text and its parallels affirm in respect of another and wholly distinct method of arriving at certain primary religious verities, surmises, conjectures, assumptions take the place of facts; or the results in which these facts may be seen to have terminated are not regarded. Then the declarations of holy writ are warped to the purposes of system by unsound interpretation, or we are required to accompany the direct, the obvious, the apparently complete and definitive sense with a reserve of which neither text nor context afford the most distant intimation on behalf of tradition, or of still more express revelation, as of *media* through which alone the "eternal power "and Godhead," or the attributes, moral and other, of the Deity, were in any degree discernible.

Now, that amid a certain degree of civilization, such as existed in Greece and Rome, the human mind has shewn itself capable of considerable and of successful efforts towards the attainment of fundamental religious and moral truths, was insisted on

in the last discourse, efforts which could not, it has been seen, have *wholly* owed their existence and their character to suggestions from external sources; could at all events not have been indebted to this source for the developement, the illustrations, the proofs in which they issued. Still, *how far* positive revelation was concerned in the primary suggestion, and what were the means of attaining in a direct or other manner to any of its truths, remains to be examined; and I am also to inquire, what indications the less instructed persons of the same communities, and the mass of mankind as subsisting amid uncivilized heathenism, present severally of the application to religion and morals of their proper powers, or of these having been assisted or superseded by light from revelation.

Before however I enter on a discussion which has for its object to advance as nearly as may be towards an adjustment of the balance between what has been elicited by the human faculties, and what may from other quarters have been supplied to it, I would dispose of the excess of theory already in this discourse adverted to, which assumes, that competent religious instruction was provided in regular succession for mankind through positive methods; since if this theory were correct, the proposed inquiry might altogether be dispensed with. And, not to insist on the obvious fact of the dearth of positive religious knowledge among the heathen, and of their own declared sense of this deficiency; we may on Scripture authority pronounce the theory in question to be untenable. Whatever be the precise meaning affixed to the term translated "winked

" at[a]," by which the view taken in the divine councils of the times of heathen ignorance has been figured to us; whether it be that of the indignation of the Deity at what occurred in those times, or of his *not* being severe to mark what then was done, or, as is more probable, of his having merely judged it fitting to forbear imparting to the heathen world the benefits of express revelation, no such ambiguity can exist in regard to the passage in the fourteenth chapter of the Acts, which declares, that " in times past" God " suffered all nations to walk in their own ways;" nor in regard to that part of the chapter first referred to, where God is said to have " determined " the times before appointed, and the bounds of " their habitation:" " determined" the times of heathenism, when once that state had by man's apostasy been induced not less than the times of the Law of Moses and of the Gospel, and " appointed" that under the former of these states men should " seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after and " find him." Not that in consequence of the departure of their ancestors from his knowledge and his worship, God had withdrawn from them the general protection of his providence, or discharged them from their responsibility as rational and moral beings; or, on the other hand, that they were thus effectually provided for by the sufficiency of a deteriorated reason; but yet in the clear and definite sense, that he declined to interfere by any such express and habitual provision for the religious and moral instruction of mankind at large, as those who

[a] Acts xvii. 30. *ὑπεριδών.*

allow themselves the supposition of what the Deity cannot but have intended, would fain make out to have existed. And our admission of this truth is further secured by a positive instruction from holy writ, in regard to the sentiments with which this portion of the divine dispensations is to be contemplated. When the kindred point of national election, of greater privileges given in this life to one people than to another, is spoken of by St. Paul, he is careful to prevent all attempts to reduce the divine proceedings to the measure of human conceptions, and to comprise them within the limits of a scheme of man's devising, by the pertinent interrogation, "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, "or who hath been his counsellor[b]?" and by referring us, not indeed to arbitrary decrees, for these would be at variance with the tenor[c] of this very passage, but to the "depth of the riches both of "the wisdom and knowledge of God," to the "un- "searchableness of his judgments," to "ways which "are past finding out." It suffices for us to know, that in the *moral* will of the Deity we have an absolute security under whatever dispensation; that our lot will be ultimately determined by the light we had, and by the use we shall have made of it.

Dismissing then this notion as anti-scriptural, we may proceed directly to the question, in what sense, and with what specific limitations severally, the facts of religious and moral light derived to mankind from tradition or from the Jewish revelation may correctly be upheld.

[b] Rom. xi. 34. [c] See verses 30, 31, 32.

Now, although tradition divides itself obviously into oral and written, yet inasmuch as they frequently co-existed, the distinction, with a view to practical conclusions, cannot always be preserved.

The Mosaic history authorizes the belief, that such religious tradition as had been diffused in consequence of the separation at Babel, was even then not free from corruption; and the same narrative confirms this notion by its accounts of the particular country to which Mizraim removed. But even though tradition had at the time of the dispersion been wholly pure, yet *oral* delivery must have changed its nature before it could permanently exhibit truths in so correct a state as to supply a definite standard of belief to the human mind for any considerable number of successive generations. Its character had in no instance so favourable a trial as when it involved a reference, authoritative or other, to a written word; yet with this support to rest on, and though we should allow some scanty fragments of the ancient Cabbala to be still existing, yet had the substance of this tradition disappeared before the Christian era. Indeed, from the Scripture history itself, we may collect the view that should be taken of this mean of religious communication. The simplicity of the one primitive language, the primary longevity of mankind, and the comparatively limited portion of the earth occupied by the patriarchs, might seem favourable to such a method; yet was it not altogether confided in without revelations. And when, for the purpose of maintaining a deposit of divine truth in order to further ends, Abraham in the first instance, and at a subsequent

epoch a whole people, were to be detached from the mass of mankind, revelations were in an especial degree vouchsafed until a law had been provided, of which the writing was divinely supplied[c], and for whose inculcation written remembrancers were specifically directed[d].

Traditions, primarily oral, became intrusted to symbolic writing, in proportion as mankind were civilized; and appear so early to have assumed that form in Egypt and the other countries of the east, that we must look to the uncultured heathen of former or of the present times, if we would behold the *oral* tradition of religious and moral truth in proper operation. And what, as respects the conservation of primitive verities, do we in effect discern? Traces faint and slight of early doctrinal truths, for these would with difficulty retain their specific characters; more decisive remains of a common origin in rites and customs, because these are better fitted to hand down the memory of such events, as being universal in their character, and, in the interest they at first inspired, arrested, at the period of their occurrence, the attention of mankind; but in rites and customs detached from the primary and principal reason of them, which, as dependent on oral transmission, would soon be lost. As then we must be content in theory with the admission of the Scripture declaration, that God was pleased, for reasons inscrutable by us, to suffer all nations, except one, to remain without direct revelation, so any accurate view that can be taken of oral tradition will lead us to esti-

[c] Exod. xxxi. 18. xxxii. 16. xxxiv. 1, 28. Deut. ix. 10.

[d] Deut. xi. 18, 20. xii. 1, 9, 16. xxxi. 22, 24.

mate at a very low rate the degree of positive religious truth, the remnant of former divine communications, which could be so preserved. In effect, even amid the less civilized heathens, features may be discerned, for which tradition, singly taken, is insufficient to account. Minds alive to religious hopes and fears, and to notions of the same character, however erroneous; a desire to obtain the favour of beings superior to our race, and assumed to take an interest in its affairs, and to be the distributors of good and evil—a notion of their placability, which the traditionary rite of sacrifices would indistinctly encourage;—actual reference to them, or to sensible objects as representing or as mistaken for them; in other words, the wants and wishes of our moral constitution exciting reason, even under circumstances the least favourable to its exercise, to some imperfect discharge of its office; and this faculty seen in consequence (almost imperceptibly to itself) to operate through the principle of causation. Indeed so apparent have been these tendencies, that both anciently and for a considerable period even in modern times, they were thought to admit of but one satisfactory explanation, that of an innate or an instinctive principle of belief in a Deity, exhibiting itself in an universal acknowledgment of the truth implanted. More extensive and accurate observation however has shewn, that these moral and religious notions are neither so clear nor accurate, neither so uniform nor universal, as instinct or as innate ideas would imply; that they depend for their actual production on a certain degree of culture of the mental powers, whilst, where this exists, they are never absolutely wanting. It is intelligible, that

the exercise of the moral capacity should vary with the cultivation of it; but such a fact would be irreconcileable with *instinct*, and hardly consistent with innate notions. In truth it was through these tendencies of man's proper nature towards religion, as one of its appointed and principal objects, and through the circumstance of this nature not being wholly dormant, that tradition itself obtained whatever hold it possessed on the human mind, and was kept alive there, until its force decreasing in proportion as it receded from its source, it gave way more or less to new inventions. These inventions were doubtless in many instances, even among barbarous nations, the effects of artifice and design; but so far only as they were adapted to the character of the human mind, and afforded occasion for some correspondent action on the part of it, would such appeals, however inadequately preferred, fulfil the purpose of their authors, and be persisted in.

Here, in short, not less than if we carry on our view to the mass of *unlettered* population in the CIVILIZED countries of antiquity, we discover an attachment to religious notions and observances, which no other description of truths, in their use or abuse, has ever excited. Oppressed as were the moral and religious tendencies of the Greek and Roman population under the load of useless or positively vicious rites and tenets, which from various sources had been permitted to accumulate, yet did not these tendencies cease to manifest themselves in an adherence to such heterogeneous and corrupt mythology, so long as an impression had not universally obtained of its actual falsehood. If they were silenced

at length by the multiplied abuses of the only religious system to which the people had access, it was because this system had become incompatible with the slightest exercise of religious and moral principle; was so far from encouraging, that it wholly thwarted the proper character of the human mind. The alternative was that of the grossest superstition and idolatry, or of absolute irreligion; and to this last the popular creed conducted at length its disgusted followers.

It is true we have now passed on from purely oral tradition to a written mythology; but this, in the *exoteric* sense in which we have been viewing it, and in which alone it could be contemplated by the generality, presented no advantage over a tradition that was unwritten. Nor, *esoterically* viewed, did the mythology of Greece and Rome, the civil, poetic, or vulgar religion, which was substantially one and the same, exhibit to its more enlightened disciples any sound traditional instruction. No doubt, by such parts of this fabulous system as had been originally derived from the East, some notices of physical and exact science, some even of the primitive truths of revelation, might figuratively be represented. But for a mind not previously instructed on these points to have extracted any one such truth from amid the mass of error with which it was surrounded, would have been equivalent almost to the excogitation of it. One distinguished philosopher did indeed interweave with his own speculations such particulars of the vulgar mythology as could be strained into accordance with them, and as might supply materials for the refinements of his

own imagination. His followers at a later period explained away mythological error, or exalted it into a system emblematic of the truth; but from any incorporation of their tenets with the religion of the country, the ancient philosophers generally were averse. In fact, the received mythology at no period of its known history appears to have contained sufficient and intelligible grounds of belief; it was rather a canvass on which lawgivers pourtrayed their schemes, and the licentious fancies of the mythological poets their inventions; and when at length this religion had attained its utmost point of depravation, the theory of the philosopher was seen to be diametrically opposed to it; so that by a distinction formally taken, the vulgar belief was regarded as suited only to the public purposes of the state and of society, and the philosophic to those of private study and meditation. The Gentile world, at two several epochs of the highest degree of civilization at which any nations of profane antiquity arrived, presented the spectacle of such primitive tradition as was couched under the vulgar religion disappearing amid the grossest perversions, and of philosophy emerging into clearer light. While we perceive the fables, the oracles, the sensible, external idolatry to die away, purer notions, though confined to a small number even of the philosophers, appear to have reached the highest point of heathen attainment in Plato, in Socrates, and in Tully. It was not then from the traditions contained in the popular religion, which possessed but little truth, and this neither easily extracted, nor the object in fact of philosophic regard, that any real assistance towards the acquisition of religious and moral no-

tions could be supplied to Greek or Roman antiquity.

But a more considerable traditionary and written source whence primitive truths might, it would seem, be derived through purer channels remains to be contemplated. Religious doctrine had not so lost its proper character through the corruption already observed to have existed at the separation of mankind, but that it still involved the primary and most important truths. These were circulated throughout the several countries into which the leaders of colonies had transplanted themselves; but then it may be questioned whether the symbolic writing employed to represent them did not tend more to augment and to perpetuate the errors by which oral tradition had in the first instance been corrupted, than to preserve the true doctrine. Certain it is, that the neglect or the perversion of this doctrine became general. Traces indeed of early truth, of monotheism in particular, derived from the dispersion, and fortified by the subsequent journeyings of the patriarchs, were never wholly effaced, and there was a difference as to the periods when the main abuses respectively established themselves; Persia retaining the distinct knowledge of the one true God longer than Chaldea; Arabia for a yet further period; while Egypt was remarkable for its early and multiplied and gross idolatry; for an animal worship, of itself sufficient to consummate the corruption of the priests who could encourage it, and of the people on whom such abominations were imposed. That the East supplied to Greece some rays of purer light from the moment when this country became capable of admitting

them, is unquestionable; its older poets, who may be regarded as its religious historians, as exhibiting the subsisting state of theology and of morals, teem with primitive truths, mixed up indeed with their own or with their country's fables, and with ethical notions, which needed not any other monitor than their own highly cultivated faculties for the suggestion of them. At the same time Greece received not those early communications without distinction. Its ancient religious system stands clear of many abuses and superstitions which had already introduced themselves into the belief of eastern countries. Further, the memory of primary instruction of a sound religious character having been imparted from those quarters, long survived any actual transmission of it; although the corruptions of the Greek mythology, to which the East itself also, at a later period, contributed, and the impurities of the mysteries, would have rendered a further communication of fundamental truths hardly less seasonable than the primary; whilst the commerce of the Grecian colonies with the East afforded a suitable channel for such renewed religious intercourse. The influence of *Judaism* on the opinions of the East will be considered apart; but in whatever degree true religion may have been thus revived in the countries to which the Jews were transported, the later philosophers of the Ionic sect, who of all the investigators of religious truth were the most successful, appear not to have gone in quest of it to other lands, or to have derived thence any assistance towards their reasonings. With the travels of other Greek philosophers, much of fable is evidently intermixed; though of fable which con-

tributes to mark at once the source whence light had been early spread over an apostate world, and the degree in which that light had wantonly been obscured. But whether any religious truth, which, as intrusted first to hieroglyphics and then to the sacerdotal letters, still lay couched there, after so considerable an interval, as the epoch even of the earliest Greek sects presents, was not too much oppressed by figure and by fable to be discernible, admits of question; unfaithful or ambiguous as were the signs to which such truth had been confided, and difficult as must have been the preservation of their sense, if orally handed down, amid the predominance of habitual and systematic idolatry.

From the limited but real assistance which heathen philosophy derived through the older traditions of primitive revelation, I pass on to the consideration of the relations which profane antiquity can be shewn to have maintained with the deposit of religious and moral truth subsisting in the Jewish Scriptures; relations whose assumed results, in any sound and sufficient apprehension of this much agitated question, will appear far more problematical. Facts indeed, as the case requires, are alleged, and conclusions are drawn from them; but when these facts have received the qualifications which discriminate views of ancient history suggest, inferences will follow very different from those which, for the purposes of system, are sometimes rested in.

Thus the Jews were indisputably chosen less for their own sakes, than with a view to the ultimate benefit of the whole human race; and while by the

absolute appointments of Providence this people became first the depositories of truth, and then the instruments of preparing mankind for a general reception of it at the Advent; while to this end concurred the various and signal events of the Jewish history, a secondary and more immediate design proposed through the same events was that of influencing, in a religious sense, the heathen; but then this design bore no such character of controul as did the divine provisions for events which were the result of an absolute determination of the Deity. It was his moral will or design, but it was not his decree, that man should have continued upright; that when fallen, he should not again have apostatised; that when this apostasy had given occasion to the calling of a particular people, this event should, in addition to its ultimate purposes of introducing an universal religion, have had a salutary effect upon the heathen, should have induced them not merely to inform themselves of the singular occurrences of the Jewish history, which lay often open to their observation, and sometimes pressed upon their senses, or even to acknowledge the hand from which they came, but to abandon their idolatry altogether, and devote themselves to the service of the One true God. Still comparatively with the Jewish people, in respect of whom the revelation was express, the heathen were "suffered to walk in "their own ways;" still the means and opportunities of returning from apostasy were indirect and partial; and even in so far as they extended they presented only a *moral trial* to the heathen, which it was the will, the "good pleasure," the benevolent desire of the Deity that they should suitably sustain.

And such is the clue to a correct interpretation of one class of Scripture passages, sometimes mistakenly cited to prove that the degree of religious knowledge which the Deity in those texts declares himself to have placed within reach of the heathen, and had designed that they should profit by, must have in fact accrued to them. There is another class of texts which announces the result, in respect of the heathen world, of such manifestations. These, were no allowance to be made for the prophetic manner, and for a certain blending in the scriptural predictions of the present and ultimate results of the true religion, for the ordinary amplifications of language, where a vast and important subject is concerned, in some places, and for the eastern style, and for that of royalty in others; these, when the requisite modifications of expression are overlooked, may be construed to imply a contemporaneous conversion of the heathen, such as would have rendered needless thenceforward the securities provided by the Deity in the Jewish law for the preservation of the truth amid idolatry, such a conversion as the Scriptures otherwise assure us was as yet not actually in question. But the limits which the tenor of holy writ concurs with profane history to affix to the interpretation of such passages, reduce their amount to this; that in regard to communications of religious truth the countries of the East were mainly intended, and that in them the God of Israel thus became in fact acknowledged, but imperfectly, but only as one of many deities [e],

[e] Bochart's remarks on the story of Daniel are so judicious that I subjoin them. "Inde hic fructus emanavit, quod rex Da-
"rius, edicto per totum imperium promulgato, coli jussit Deum

or, as the local and peculiar object of Jewish worship; that His service thus once more became mixed up with that of the deities of Paganism, as before the captivity it had so been united by the Jews themselves; that the excesses of idolatry were nevertheless restrained, the knowledge of the One true God in some degree revived, and a foundation laid for the fuller acquaintance with the Jewish doctrines which the settlement of that people in Egypt under Alexander and the translation of its Scriptures were to promote. Meantime, however, both as this subject regards the eastern nations, and also as introductory to the connection of the Jewish history with that of the Greek philosophy, it is important to remark, that the portion of the Jewish nation [f] subsisting in Egypt a short time before the age of that philosophy was ill prepared to become the instructors of the heathen, as being itself immersed in the grossest idolatry; and though this obstacle from the time of the captivity was now to cease, yet for the mean of impure religious communication with the heathen thus broken off, a purer was not substituted. Numerous proselytes of the gate there had been, and some proselytes of the co-

" Danielis. Non quidem vero cultu. Neque enim Assyrii idolis " suis renunciaverunt, quorum cultus cum veri Dei cultu stare " non potest. Proinde Darius Deum non vocat Deum suum, " sed Deum Danielis. Nondum scilicet venerat tempus vocatio- " nis gentium. Tamen hoc edictum Darii et aliud simile Nebu- " cadnessaris, (Dan. iii. 29.) et jejunium Ninivitis indictum ad " avertendam summi numinis iram (Jon. iii. 5.) et quæ alia " fuerunt hujus generis videntur fuisse totidem προπαρασκευαὶ " ad populorum conversionem quæ Christi adventum subsecuta " est." *SS. Animal.* lib. 3. cap. 3. sub fin.

[f] Jerem. cap. xliv.

venant, at particular periods; but there was no general submission of the heathen to Jewish tenets, even to the degree in which the Jews had submitted to pagan idolatry; nor did this people now manifest any considerable zeal to propagate their own doctrine. They became concentrated in their religious worship, whilst in proportion as their civil intercourse with the heathen was from external circumstances augmented, the laws of the elders imposed proportionate restraints both on the Jews themselves, and on the admission of proselytes. Then must also be considered the general effect of the Mosaic system, whose main object was the preservation of the true religion in the world by the separation of a particular people, an appointment of which the history of mankind confirms the wisdom, by shewing that the laws of the Jewish code, expressly framed with a view to this object, were needed and had been effectual. They had even, through the wilfulness of the nation, an influence beyond what had been proposed; induced an habitual alienation of their minds from the rest of their fellow-creatures, who in their turn contemplated the Jews with correspondent sentiments. These were not, it is true, that despised or that unknown people which sometimes they are described to have been, but in religious respects they were absolutely insulated. Even their dispersions, which it might at first sight appear would have qualified this mutual estrangement, supply but few traces of such a result. Often in civil and political concerns, always in what regarded their religion, the Jews, whether of Egypt, or Babylon, or Persia, were a distinct people; their own abandonment of idolatry subsequently to the captivity had disposed them to view it with just ab-

horrence in those by whom they were surrounded; and the spirit of separation which pervades their ritual, and lies at the foundation of its specific appointments, constantly [g] operated to the debarring them from domestic and social intercourse with other nations.

And if these observations apply to the relative position of the Jews and heathens generally, until yet later periods than those we have been now contemplating, they have an especial bearing on the relation of the former people with Greece and with philosophy. For it was not until the establishment of the Greek empire in Egypt, until times that are somewhat subsequent to those of Plato and even of Aristotle, that any such intercourse between the Jew and Gentile world becomes apparent, as might probably lead to a communication of religious truth. As till that epoch the Jews enjoyed not in Egypt the public use of their own religion, so had they shewn till then no disposition to modify their habits of life with reference to those of the people among whom they dwelt. And hence arises a question in regard to the notion that even Plato, to say nothing of earlier philosophers, since he visited Egypt while it was yet under the Persian rule, might obtain access to the Jewish Scriptures, or even an acquaintance with their contents. The difficulties which he is supposed to have encountered in procuring communications from the priests of Egypt, on the subject of their mysteries, would be greatly enhanced in the instance of a people still

[g] After the Advent this spirit continues to be strongly marked in the historical parts of the New Testament.

jealous, at the period in question, of any interference with their religion; and averse, even for secular purposes, to other intercourse with the heathen than what necessity imposed. Nor is the impression which these historical facts are fitted to create abated by a view of the internal evidence. The argument, indeed, that the Scriptures were the source whence all that the heathen knew of religious truth had primarily been derived, was encouraged, as is conceivable, by Jewish writers, and was employed also by some of the early Christians for the purpose of justifying their own relinquishment of heathenism, and influencing those who still adhered to it. Attempts accordingly were made to verify the position by details. Eusebius[h], more especially, has taken considerable pains to exhibit an accordance of Plato's writings with the Hebrew records, and specifically with the Pentateuch; and both on the general ground of resemblance, and also with reference to the charge of plagiarism, Plato has been termed the "Philosopher of the "Hebrews[i]," and the "Attic Moses[k]." But whoever impartially examines the various points in respect of which the comparison has been instituted, will perceive that the argument grounded on it would prove too much. That even *written profane* tradition should be uncertain; that where it exists in its purest state, much should still be left to the

[h] Euseb. Præp. Evan. lib. x. xi. xii. in tot. The preventions of Justin Martyr and of Clem. Alex. are equally apparent; but the details of Eusebius are peculiarly interesting and instructive, though they want a foundation in respect of this specific object.

[i] Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. i. p. 321. Potter; where see note also.

[k] Ibid. Strom. lib. i. 411. and see note.

operations of the human mind in respect of the establishment of moral and religious truths; and that the results should bear decisive marks of the imperfection both of the mental powers themselves, and of the notices which have thus been lent to it, is intelligible: but the acquaintance with a positive and definite revelation, such as that of the Jewish Scriptures, if *direct*, would have rendered the views of the Greek philosophy far more distinct and accurate and explicit, than now they are seen to be, whilst even *indirect* communications from the same express source could hardly fail to have supplied certain main *facts* of the Mosaic history, decisive of points continually and vainly agitated by the heathen. Facts indeed their ἱεροὶ λόγοι contained; but they were presented with the dimness of remote tradition; nor did they come recommended on any definite authority which might qualify them for dictating a solution to philosophic difficulties. The writings of Plato indicate no such clear and correct acquaintance with the truths of the Jewish Scriptures, as even incidental communications of the contents of a written and subsisting document of so express a character would have ensured. Against Aristotle[1] the charge of hebraising has been brought with yet less appearance of foundation; and more generally the points of agreement between the Jewish Scriptures and the writings of profane antiquity are to be accounted for upon grounds much short of these; partly by a reference of them to indistinct views of certain truths of holy writ obtained from

[1] Brucker, vol. i. 794. has well explained the purposes for which this charge was brought.

the concurrent stream of primitive tradition, and then by the obligation which philosophy owes to a circumstance not unfrequently overlooked amid the pre-occupations of system, namely, the possession by mankind at large of a common nature with the people for whom these Scriptures more expressly were provided. If indeed in regard to the *peculiar doctrines* of revelation an essential and exact resemblance with the writings of profane antiquity could have been established, there would be but one allowable conclusion; but no such resemblance has been made good; and the truths of natural theology and ethics are a common property; mankind have, in proportion to their degree of mental culture, one general claim to them; and neither their character nor the facts of history will allow of an exclusive and systematic reference of their origin to revelation.

Although then the incidental spreading of revealed truth among the eastern nations appears indeed to have been contemplated by the Almighty as a contingent purpose, which the heathen, in proportion as they came within the influences of this truth might realize, yet the predisposing causes which kept the greater part of Paganism aloof from a proper belief were not restrained from their natural operation; and the question is rather of means of knowledge and conviction, of which certain of the heathen might have availed themselves, than of any proper and sufficient use having actually been made of them. In respect of the Greeks, these opportunities appear not to have occurred until the philosophy of that nation had attained its utmost

height, and was even on the wane. The superior antiquity of the Jewish records, singly taken, though fit to be borne in mind, proves nothing; many other relations besides those of time require to be considered, in order to the adjustment of such a question. To us, indeed, who appreciate the character and admit the authority of that code, it seems to be a light which even by its obliquer rays could hardly fail to dissipate the gloom of Paganism; yet in point of fact, and even at that later period, when the Septuagint translation had been made, and the Jewish people rather sought than avoided communication with the heathen, little solicitude was felt by these concerning the truths of which the Jews might be the depositories. Some facts of the Jewish history, some especial prophecies thenceforward forced themselves into notice; but the traces of an acquaintance with Jewish tenets, and even of what was yet more open to observation, with their habits and observances, to be met with in heathen writers, are, under a change of circumstances highly favourable to the knowledge of them, extremely scanty. There are no vestiges in the national worship of Greece and Rome of any of the proper features of Judaism; as there is no internal or other evidence of its having influenced the better periods of the Greek philosophy.

The views then of tradition and of the Jewish Scriptures, when considered with reference to the sources whence light was derived to the heathen, require to be kept distinct. Indiscriminate appeals to them cannot promote the purposes of truth. Much, no doubt, was owing to primitive and to

patriarchal revelation; the very indistinctness of the traditions on certain points, as compared with the same points when found in revelation, marks the specific source and its antiquity. Still the facts will not bear us out in attributing, without reserve, to tradition the religious and ethical truths exhibited by heathen philosophy. They absolutely desert those who would ascribe such a mass of imperfect and incoherent tenets as is ancient philosophy, after all, when considered in the aggregate, to an express and co-existing revelation.

But has holy writ itself cast no light historic or other upon the question before us? A broad and clear one, if we forbear to introduce extraneous notions into its interpretation. The sacred volume would even authorize our advancing beyond the point at which it is the specific object of the present discussion to arrive. For the Scriptures intimate both the practicability of attaining to the primary truths of natural theology and ethics through the proper employment of the mental powers, and also the fact of the heathen not having altogether failed in the discovery. It is true, an objection is sometimes taken to a scriptural inquiry of this nature on the ground that writers themselves inspired, and also addressing those who lived under the general influences of revelation, are to be understood as speaking with a constant reference to the light which was thus enjoyed. But first, in some of the passages to which this objection is applied, it amounts only to the leaving doubtful the sense and character in which the speaker is to be understood, does not authorize the absolute interpretation which is con-

tended for. And secondly, to quit this debateable ground, the objection is wholly without a bearing on my text and on the other passages I shall cite, which are either of universal application, and so of course embrace the heathen, or expressly regard the particular condition of the pagan world, and the means they had of attaining to religious knowledge.

And first, in the nineteenth Psalm a contrast plainly is intended between such religious and moral truth as is derivable severally from the creation and the Jewish Law. The heavens, and the sun as one principal ornament of that creation, declare or cause distinctly and certainly to be known, the glory and the wisdom, the power and the goodness of Him who made them; they speak through a channel which admits of being understood, not merely by those who are previously possessed of the assistance of revealed light, but by every nation whom the material sun illumines; by those therefore amid whom primitive tradition may have become extinct, and who understand not any other language. All may read there, as in a book, the wonderful skill of that Almighty Being who framed this well compacted and well ordered structure. More literally, the heavens and their revolutions supply so many *lines* or *letters*, which are held forth to the perusal of all mankind; although to us, as at the seventh verse, the contrast is expressed, although to us the Deity is conspicuous in a still more perfect way by the revelation he has made of himself in the Law of Moses. It is true, the early part of this Psalm (express as may seem its language in respect of the material creation) has been strained to a Gospel sense, on the

plea that St. Paul, in the tenth of the Epistle to the Romans, has made a citation from it; but unhappily for the inference, the latter portion of the Psalm, which extols the Law of the Lord above the sources of knowledge mentioned in the former part, would in that case be found to praise the Jewish revelation at the expence of the Christian; nor would the misapprehension be less of what St. Paul intended; for this was plainly to exhibit the analogy between the natural and moral dispensations of the Deity and that of revelation; to mark the spirit of universality that pervades them; and to convey the intimation that the Gospel was in his time diffusing among the Gentiles the truths of Christianity on as comprehensive a plan as that by which the visible world according to the Psalmist, and we may add according to the Apostle also, since he has cited and employed the passage, spreads far and wide the primary truths of the existence and attributes of Him who made it.

The same source of religious light is pointed out in the Acts, where we are told, that although in the "determination of the times before appointed" the heathen were suffered to "walk in their own ways," yet God was "not left without witness[m]" in the works of creation and in the gifts of Providence, in those evidences of his attributes, and pre-eminently of his goodness. Again, it was the divine intention, that through these means of knowing Him, and specifically through that distinguished part of the creation, our own physical and mental constitution, man-

[m] Acts xiv. 17.

kind should "seek the Lord, if haply they might "feel after and find him," although since "in him "we live, and move, and have our being," from each of these facts, from existence, from motion, from the *character* of our being, *each of us*[n] may by the causal argument without difficulty ascend to a *Creator* or supreme *Mover*, endued with like moral and intellectual qualities to those which he has vouchsafed to a portion of his creation, for this purpose, amongst others, of acknowledging and of honouring him. The circumstance of our being in a certain sense the "offspring of God," a fact which the heathen world could perceive, a heathen poet announce, and an inspired apostle adopt, should suffice to prevent the idolatry which would interfere with our rational adoration of him. In the spiritual essence he has bestowed upon ourselves, we are supplied both with an appropriate exemplification of his character, and with capacities by the aid of which we may rise to a far more exalted apprehension of the Giver than as of a being not distinct from matter, and "like unto gold or silver."

Yet more explicitly, if possible, in my text, the wrath of God is declared to have been revealed from heaven against those who "hold the truth," or "among whom[o]" that which "was or might be

[n] "Though he be not far from *every one of us*; for in him we "live, and move, and have our being." Acts xvii. 27, 28, 29.

[o] Such I take to be the sense of ἐν αὐτοῖς in this place; and therefore I forbear to press the words, as some have done, into the service of a meaning more directly to my purpose; namely, as having a specific reference to the mental frame. At the same time the human mind, as a principal part of creation, is com-

"known of God was manifest," because God had mediately[p] shewed it to them; but who *held* the truth in unrighteousness as far as their own religious and moral conduct was concerned, and who *withheld* or suppressed it in regard to others. And the way in which they attained to this knowledge of God is expressly added. The invisible things of the Deity, his eternal power, and various other attributes, (for these are included in the complex term θειότης,) are clearly seen from the things that are made. How? through the medium of tradition? No; but "νοούμενα," provided they be well considered and reflected on, so as to become the groundwork of a facile but rational induction. Those more enlightened heathens then to whom the apostle plainly alludes, were not ἀναπολόγητοι[q], because they did not "*know*" God in some certain sense, but because "*when*" or *although*, through the visible creation they had become assured of his existence, they "glorified him not as God, neither were thankful;" did not *choose*, did not *care*, did not take any *pains* sufficiently to "retain" him in their knowledge; wor-

prehended of course in the ποιήματα, or "things that are made," whence the existence and attributes of God are deducible. Ἐν αὐτοῖς yet less refer to innate ideas, (a customary interpretation while these were held,) or to self-evident truths; for no truth can be evident to the mind without some process, however brief and even imperceptible.

[p] Φανερόω is often used by St. John in a mediate sense; see John ii. 11. ix. 3. xvii. 6. 1 John iv. 9. Also by St. Paul; as 2 Cor. vii. 12. and xi. 6.

[q] εἰς τὸ εἶναι might even be translated *in order that*, without implying a decree or compulsive and absolute interference: thus; "in order that *in the contingent event* of their abusing the means "afforded, God might be justified, and they *without excuse*."

shipped and served the creature *together with*[r] the Creator, or even *more*[r] than him; "knew" him not even, in so full and effectual a sense as to receive him for the *only* God, and as one who would not "give his honour to another;" carried not on the knowledge of him into those acts of *exclusive* homage which it supposes.

But though the heathen generally were far from acting up to the notions of religious or of moral truth which they were in fact possessed of, and although they were without a positive law, such as was enjoyed by the Jews, (a people with whom the apostle is here contrasting them,) yet did they in some instances exhibit the "work of the law," or the same results which, had they been acquainted with the Jewish code, would have proceeded from its observance. They were not without a sense of the judgment of God impending over those who violate his moral laws; they discerned in conscience the representative of a superior power, the witness of their religious and moral state, and who rewards and punishes; nor did their "thoughts[s]" remain unexercised in respect of the moral distinctions; they *argued* upon *moral* grounds, "accused" or "excused" others in conformity to this standard, and with the aid of "conscience[t]," they applied it also

[r] Παρὰ: both senses are historically justified; indeed the one is but an amplification of the other.

[s] Λογισμοὶ. Properly, *reasonings*. Our translators, however, with their usual discrimination, have well rendered the term here by "thoughts," or by a word which comprehends both *intellectual* and *moral* discernment.

[t] Συμμαρτυρουσῆς, testifying to the fact of their own internal

to themselves. Thus does the apostle expressly represent the heathen as conversant, amid whatever imperfections, with the primary religious and moral truths, with the existence and attributes of the Deity, and with the moral distinctions; and if I insist not further, as the case would well allow, in regard to the bearings of this first and second chapter on the present subject, it is because the argument on behalf of the source whence the human mind is capable of deriving, and has actually in some degree obtained, fundamental religious and moral truth, has thus already received ample sanction. In respect of the endeavour to introduce tradition into the interpretation of the 19th Psalm, and of the two first chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, the question is not whether this may not have been one source (it is admitted as such) of religious knowledge, but whether it was a source exclusive of another and an independent one; of the natural and moral creation, considered as a distinct foundation for such truth, and of the efforts of the human mind as employed on these phenomena; whether the circumstance that both the Psalmist and St. Paul expressly insist on this foundation, apart from tradition, and without any reference to it, be not sufficient to hinder the sound conscientious interpreter of Scripture from attempting to obtain hence on behalf of tradition, as though without it the religious and moral acquirements of the heathen were inexplicable, an indirect authority. Indeed we may discover in the texts

condition, and coupling it with the law by which that condition is to be judged of. This term may either imply, that several parties know the same thing, or one party several. See Rom. viii. 16. 1 Cor. ii. 11. 1 John iii. 21.

themselves, minutely inquired into, or again as elucidated in some degree by profane antiquity, reasons for believing, that in the meaning of these inspired writers tradition had no place. The original expressions in the 19th Psalm imply the possibility of a clear and full, an universal and perpetual declaration of the glory of God to his intelligent creatures; and St. Paul asserts, that the divine power and godhead are "clearly seen" or "understood" from "the "things that are made." Now on our inquiry into the reasonings of philosophy, actual existence or the creation was perceived to be the groundwork on which, in regard to the Deity and his attributes, their arguments proceeded; to which even metaphysical conclusions[u] were sometimes ultimately referable. St. Paul supposes also that the acknowledgment is of one God only; and the divine Unity ancient philosophy deduced from the same foundations, though not in the degree which the premises would have warranted, and to the exclusion of inferior divine intelligences. Now these express and unqualified positions of the Scriptures, this condemnation of the heathen for not making a fuller use of the means afforded for the *acquirement* of religious knowledge, as well as for the intelligent practice of the duties flowing from it, are inconsistent with the notion that the visible creation, duly resorted to, sufficed not to convey these truths, in a very considerable degree at least, in a greater than that to which the heathens, on the authority of the apostle, and of the history of philosophy, are seen to have attained; that it thus speaks to those only who have at the same time other distinct and positive

[u] See the argument ἐξ ὁμοίου, Sermon V.

methods of arriving at the same truths. It may intelligibly be affirmed of the heathen, that they were "without excuse" for not employing, proportionably to their general mental culture, and to the facilities which certain specified foundations of religious truth afforded, faculties ever present with them, on the discovery or maintenance of such truth, or on the exemplification of its contents in action: but how could they be *without excuse*, or (which is a sound and scriptural consideration) how could the divine proceedings in regard to the heathen be "justified," and they be even *blameable*, for not eliciting truth from data of themselves unequal to the supplying it; or to the supplying it in larger measures than were in fact obtained from them: how be without excuse, for not arresting the decline, and supplying the deficiencies of a waning tradition? It deserves attention further, that when, as in his discourse at Athens, St. Paul would bring home to his hearers the primary religious verities, and the means they possessed of becoming acquainted with them, not the slightest allusion is there to tradition as to a source of instruction still subsisting in sufficient purity to deserve his notice. The apostle refers them only to the proper truths of natural religion, as having been within their reach; and to these, as deducible by their reason from the premises he points out; and he passes on thence to the peculiar truths and the specific object of the Christian revelation, as to a sort of knowledge which it thenceforward concerned them to superinduce upon those primary verities.

Enough then of active endeavour and operation

on the part of the human mind is discernible in the religious and moral history of heathenism, and may on Scripture authority be asserted to have existed, both to establish the fact of an intimate relation between ethics and our proper nature, and to dissipate the notion of such inertness as might seem inconsistent with it. Natural theology and morals are not only deducible from grounds supplied by the mental constitution itself, when considered as a part of the effects of creative wisdom, but the human mind can to a certain degree exert itself in deducing them; can complete the deduction under the circumstances of express assistance.

Nor is the necessity of such assistance to a complete induction, of a nature to detract essentially from the character of the mental powers. The Jewish and Christian revelations have not altered, yet less could traditionary aids have done so, the proper features of the mind, or suspended, ordinarily speaking, the usual operation of its faculties. As little have they interfered with the distinctive nature of the truths themselves. On the contrary, it is assumed throughout the Scripture, that those whom it addresses are in a certain degree qualified, by the previous exercise of their intellectual and moral powers upon primary truths, for the reception of the specific doctrines it communicates. The character of our mental constitution and of natural and ethical truth is supposed and recognised; and while the operations of the human faculties, in this application of them, are facilitated by the more extensive field of knowledge which revelation has displayed, a clearer and fuller light is imparted even to

those truths themselves. Our views of them are enlarged and consolidated; and they acquire an increased importance by their being seen to be interwoven with the scheme of redemption; by the relations which they possess with its origin, with its process, with its ultimate objects. At the same time, through peculiar doctrinal communications, through the new grounds of duty, and the express sanctions and assistances which the Christian dispensation exhibits, a distinction is created, which enables us to assign bounds to the proper truths of natural theology and ethics; a distinction between the points which however actually discovered, or in whatever degree elucidated by revelation, have a basis in our nature, and admit consequently of an habitual appeal to it by reason; and truths with which the concern of reason is indirect and incidental.

The sum then of what, in these two discourses, has been maintained, is this: The conscientious exercise of reason supposes, that on subjects of such importance as those of religion and morality we carry down our foundations till we arrive at the living rock of ultimate truth. Towards the effecting of this purpose, metaphysical argument appears, for the reasons offered in the last discourse, to be insufficient; although the synthetic method, as applied to this specific subject, has a decided use, when once the argument from effect to cause has supplied us with a groundwork in real existence, and specifically in our own intellectual and moral character. At the same time, by an intellectual nature, it will have been seen, is intended only a nature endued with

the faculty of reason, or that capacity of the simple essence the mind, which reasons, and which discerns between truth and falsehood. By a moral nature in like manner is meant that capacity inherent in the same essence, through which, in proportion as it is cultivated, the mind not merely distinguishes between right and wrong, good and evil, but approves or condemns, applies the notion of merit or demerit, when once experience and observation have supplied it with the requisite materials for its exercise. And the nature so endowed is not here contemplated metaphysically, yet less as possessed of innate or instinctive notions, but as a part, and one most intimate to ourselves, of actual creation; one consequently whence we may most readily and fully induce the truths in question.

Antecedently however to the employing of the truths whose independent existence was thus appropriately established, it seemed requisite to advert to certain theories for the purpose of reducing their pretensions to a just value, and of shewing their relation to my subject to be purely incidental. Upon such a footing it would have been unsuitable to press the conclusions deducible from the religious and ethical attainments of the heathen beyond the degree required to destroy the pretence of the human capacities for religious and moral truth having exhibited no signs of active existence and spontaneous exercise under Gentilism, and of moral truth having no proper foundation in our nature. To have done more than this, although the particulars I have adduced, confirmed as they are by the authority of Scripture, would have secured success to such an

undertaking, might have contributed to perpetuate the confusion which it is my object to dissipate, of the proper character of the truths themselves with the subordinate question of the degree in which the human mind may actually have been assisted in attaining to them. Conformably to the views here exhibited, let the facts be recognised of these truths being by a correct train of reasoning deducible from our nature, and of the heathen having been actively engaged in the pursuit of them, there is nothing here which militates against the reception of whatever can be substantiated in respect of the religious and moral light derived to the heathen world from tradition or other external sources. In like manner the assistance which Christianity has afforded to natural and moral truth may be admitted in perfect consistency with the essential character of the human mind, and of the truths whose developement has thus been aided.

Two of the points proposed at the outset of the last discourse, namely, what it is that constitutes the independence of truths, and how far those of natural theology and ethics have a claim to this independent character, have been thus considered and determined; and the excesses of theory which would deprive the evidences for Christianity of a proper support from those quarters have been redressed. On the next occasion therefore I may proceed to justify the importance attached to the distinct existence of these truths, by shewing their uses in respect of revelation, the character and the extent of their connection with its evidences.

My object however has at the same time been to obtain precisely such a groundwork as, while it secures the independence of natural and moral truths, and their relations with truths revealed, with the specific proofs and with the subject-matter of revelation, supplies no pretext for any unsuitable superstructure; for that opposite extreme of system which would resolve the substance of the evidences into moral considerations, rest them principally or altogether on natural and moral data, and on overstrained conclusions from them. On this account, as well as to avoid all vain contention, I have hitherto forborne to give to the truths in question the titles of law, or light, or religion of nature; since the propriety of employing these or any other such comprehensive terms depends less on any definite sense they necessarily involve, than on the meaning which in a given instance may be attached to them. After the views however which have now been taken, no difficulty either in defining or in maintaining natural religion, such as is sometimes objected, can occur. It includes all such religious and moral truths as (even though they should be found introduced into revelation itself) are correctly deducible from premises independent of it. Truths of this description, so long as our nature continues what it is, must still exist, whatever be the extent of the obligations of a *fallen* nature to revelation for their discovery, and for their elucidation. The *natural* religion so defined then takes its proper direction when it introduces the mind to such orderly and discriminative views of revealed truth, and of the several grounds of evidence on which it rests, as shew the adaptation

of this truth and evidence to the character and condition of the being for whom revelation is designed, as embrace both the distinctions and the relations of the two Systems.

Of the motives in which has originated the denial or the disregard of an independent subsistence of truths so fitted to prepare the mind for a due reception of the positive communications of the same Author, so fitted to render that reception if already afforded more intelligent and effectual, the most ordinary is the alarm taken at such exaggerated notions of the claims of natural religion as the views of it here exhibited are calculated to repress. Extravagant, no doubt, are the pretensions which have been thus advanced, as though a complete scheme of religious truth and evidence was discoverable, had actually been struck out by the light of nature. Still it is not by confounding the incidental fact of the actual discovery of truths with their essential character, or representing the *question* of their discovery as the point to be mainly agitated, that justice can be done to the truths of natural religion, or the demands of revelation itself be satisfied. The incompetency of human reason in our present deteriorated state to discover or establish the complex of natural religion, is indeed a fact which history assures us of; and the assistance which revelation has afforded towards eliciting and towards facilitating the apprehension of truths properly belonging to that system, towards supplying the defects, not of natural religion itself, but of our imperfect apprehensions of it, is to an unprejudiced mind not less apparent; but the absolute inadequacy of this sys-

tem, in the most entire and accurate views of it, to remedy the wants of a lapsed nature, is the point to which the attention should principally be directed. The very circumstance of this religion having an original and independent foundation in our nature, disqualifies it for becoming a sufficient scheme of belief and duty for that nature when fallen, even though we were capable without the aid of revelation of exhibiting its truths in their just perfection. Unless therefore it can be shewn that heathenism in its most enlightened state discovered, or infidelity by the process of reason is able to induce, the specific truths which constitute the distinction of the Christian system, the cause of revelation, thus submitted to its proper issue, is secure. This main point established, revelation, which thus is seen to have nothing to apprehend within its own peculiar province from the amplest views which can be taken of natural religion when retained within its proper boundaries of reason, derives material assistance from the correct employment of this system. If in natural religion, or rather if under cover of that term, in abstract reasonings which have no foundation in nature or in morals, the deist has sought matter for his own prejudications against the possibility or the likelihood, the need or the actual grant of revelation, and has exaggerated and misrepresented with this view the present powers of the human mind, the extent of its acquirements, and the force and bearings of moral truth, it is not by the substitution of one extreme in the place of its opposite, by a disavowal of the proper mental character and capacities, of the exertions which they can be proved to have manifested on behalf of religious and moral truth, of the

independent existence of the truths themselves, that such an antagonist can be effectually replied to, or the cause of revelation be adequately maintained. This is to cut off from the deist all mean of a proper conviction by argument, and from ourselves the facility of debating with him upon common ground. It is by taking a stand on this very foundation of natural religion reclaimed from such perverse exhibitions of it, as on a system which we, not our opponents, in reality are interested in maintaining; as on one which in various ways prepares for and renders intelligible the grant of revelation, and the character which in effect belongs to it; as on one which an intelligent and conscientious deist would not regard as his final resting place, but would allow to have its proper course in conducting him to the fact of revelation having been afforded. That system has no proper tendency to supersede the revealed scheme, or to instill into the human mind a sense of the sufficiency either of natural and moral truth, or of the powers of the human mind as employed on it. It is true that even under Christianity some have pretended to derive from it all these notions; but a contrary impression, we know, was actually produced upon the wisest heathens.

These perpetual oscillations which the history of theology brings out to view in regard to the ultimate securities of religion; the alternative of extremes alone which that science would appear to offer, arise not, it is fit the youthful inquirer should be aware, out of the proper character of the evidences themselves, but from the want of a just intellectual and moral poise in the minds of those who discuss

them. They are abuses ingrafted on the process of probable proof, and to which, as we have seen, in unfaithful or incapable hands, this method of proof peculiarly is liable; and the present purpose is to ascertain whether, after the repeated examinations which this subject has undergone, some such understanding may not now at length be acquiesced in, as shall fix the independent existence of natural religion and its relations to Christianity in that temperate sense and measure which revelation as such supposes, which reason and the Scriptures concurrently admit, and by which the demands of truth are satisfied.

SERMON VII.

MARK iii. 22—26.

And the Scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.

And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?

And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand;

And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand;

And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.

WHEN the mind, under due intellectual and moral government, is directed to the subject of natural religion, and to the connection which this system properly possesses with revelation, the abuses on these points, from which no age of Christianity has been free, become distinctly manifest. Scarcely had this dispensation been consolidated by the promulgation of a written word, when attempts were hazarded for the purpose of establishing a complete or a sufficient system of religious truth with the aid, but at the expence of revelation. In exposing the unsound and disingenuous character of these endeavours it was not thought sufficient to maintain, as could easily have been done, the greater antiquity of the Jewish dispensation, and the proper supe-

riority both of this and of the Christian scheme over heathenism; nor even to assert the fact and point out the instances of specific obligations which philosophy had owed to traditionary revelation in the first instance, and at a recent period to the Jewish or the Christian Scriptures. A positive character was insisted on as an uniform feature of all religious truth; and imaginary or magnified parallelisms between the writings of sacred and profane antiquity were appealed to as the evidences of heathen plagiarism. This imputation, whether as advanced or as repelled, equally secured an undue importance and authority to the suggestions of human reason; for the identity of certain heathen tenets, not with natural and moral truth alone, but with the specific doctrines of revelation, having been in the first instance mistakenly assumed on both parts, they obtained currency in the one case as so many transcripts of revealed truth, in the other as not unequal rivals. Of this compound character was the attachment first to an unfaithful exhibition of the opinions of Plato, and then to a still more perverted one of the Aristotelic philosophy; attachments which threatened to introduce severally to the religious acceptance of mankind what in reality was no other than a refined paganism.

If the discussions which gave occasion to those early excesses, though somewhat varied in their application, and even occasionally dormant, still subsist, still shew themselves in correspondent results, it is because the same indiscriminate views have been perpetuated. Natural and moral truths now, as in the early periods of the Church, are not sufficiently

distinguished from those which are of the exclusive province of revelation.

In the present discourses these points have been kept distinct. The question of discovery has not only been confined to natural and moral truths, in respect of which alone there can be any proper application of it, but even within these limits it has been treated as an incidental point; has not been employed to decide upon the independence of the truths themselves, nor on the capacities in relation to them of the human mind. The foundations of natural religion when considered as subsisting distinctly from the natural and moral truths incorporated in revelation, as well as from the specific doctrines of that scheme, have been laid in our mental constitution, as the principal and most appropriate part of the extensive groundwork which the creation supplies; whilst the question of the *degree* in which human reason may actually have been employed on this foundation retains its due and subordinate place and character. By such discriminative arrangement alone can the existence, the character, and extent of the connection of natural with revealed religion, which I am now to consider, be accurately determined; and the cause of religious evidence receive the full and the intelligent support which it may justly claim.

For whatever may have been the fact, and although it could be shewn that the Deity had altogether anticipated the operations of the human mind by positive revelation, so as to impart in this manner both the knowledge of himself and also all other

principles of religious truth and duty, yet would it be undeniable that the nature to which revelation addresses itself, first as upright, then as fallen, was anterior to the several positive divine communications which were made to it. The truths therefore which even in our present impaired condition (and with such help only from revelation as detracts not from the independent character either of these truths or of our mental constitution) are correctly and by the suitable employment of our faculties deducible from that nature, must have been always so; whether or not they were in fact deduced, or however inadequate the deduction. Such would be the order of our conceptions and of nature, although it should not prove to be the order in which these truths have actually been made known to us.

Some such truths there are then which, partaking with the sources whence they emanate of the characters of *priority* and *independence*, thus become fitted to supply the primary foundations of a divine interposition. At the same time, in exhibiting this first branch of the connection between natural and revealed truth, great care confessedly is necessary, lest the approach to revelation be needlessly embarrassed by the maintaining as fundamental, as indispensably preliminary to its specific and positive evidences, what may not be strictly entitled to this character. And if under this impression we contemplate the long train of introductory points through which, in no small number of the systems of theology, we are expected to make good our way to the immediate proofs of Christianity, the question properly suggests itself, whether even to theoretic and me-

thodical views of religious evidence so ample a preparation indeed be requisite.

And here we must take into account the proper character of revelation itself. This is express and authoritative; suited to its design of communicating truths more clearly and with greater expedition and effect than is attainable by process of reasoning, and under sanctions purely human. Even then although the doctrinal truths which it was the specific object of an universal revelation to communicate, had been wholly within the province of reason, they would with difficulty have been so arrived at by a considerable portion of mankind, nor could they appropriately have been received on merely human authority. But since reason is not equal to their discovery, the truths promulgated must on this account also claim reception upon the footing of their positive evidence; and this, both from its own nature, and also as corresponding with the character and purpose of revelation, will be direct and obvious. While the requisite distinction is maintained between the evidences as exhibited systematically or in a more popular form, and as presented to minds of greater or less capacity and attainment; and while room is left for such natural and moral foundations as the character of positive proof may require; and for such collateral support to it, and to the truths it evidences, as may be derivable from the same quarters; it must still be true, that the substantial proofs of a divine revelation admit of brief and simple statement.

Now, under the joint influence of the two considerations which have been here presented, namely,

the priority and independence which belong to natural religion, and the express and obvious character which is essential to the design and the success of revelation, we need not hesitate to determine, that while there are truths of natural religion, of which it may correctly be affirmed, (derivable as is that system from human nature, and essential as is the connection of revelation and of its positive attestations with the same nature,) that they contribute both to the proof of revelation itself, and to the support of its specific evidences, yet must these natural and moral contributions be reducible within specific and definite bounds.

I. In the first place, then, certain contributions of natural religion to the support of the positive evidences of revelation may be regarded as fundamental. The intellectual and moral distinctions of true and good are so uniformly engendered in the mind by that culture of the human faculties which an intelligent application to the evidences of religion will have pre-supposed, that no truths from without can be so intimate to our minds, none are there of whose existence we are so immediately and fully assured, as of those rational and moral differences. Hence they become the groundwork and the test of other truths. When therefore revelation addressed itself by miracles and by accomplishments of prophecy to the senses, a belief in what was thus attested, in so far as it was intelligent, in so far as it included the notion of the revelation being from God, supposed as of course a previous acquaintance with those primary tenets of natural theology the existence and attributes of the Deity; an ac-

knowledgment of the author of that ordinary course of nature which was interrupted; of the omniscience which unerringly foresees and predicts; of the divine truth and faithfulness which are our securities that we shall not be deceived in giving implicit credence to what proceeds from such a source. But this belief, though itself indispensable, was not alone required. As in order to the appreciating of a miracle, mankind must first be aware of a course of nature which such an attestation violates, so the interruptions of that course which reason could perceive to have proceeded from a power more than human might nevertheless be produced by a being inferior to the Deity[a], and that being an evil one. Recourse therefore, strictly speaking, would be necessary to the rational and moral character of the human mind, and to the principles it elicits, in order to the establishment of a secure chain of connection between the miracle, the doctrine attested, and a divine author. When the communications thus witnessed were seen to be neither contradictory in themselves, nor at variance with those plain and primary truths from which the human understanding is not at liberty to depart, nor with those ethical distinctions from which, inasmuch as they are intimations through a distinct channel, of the one moral will of the Deity, a positive revelation from him cannot be discordant, a correct reliance might thenceforward be placed on their authority as divine. It would be conceivable that the Deity might change the laws of nature which are contingent; it would be obviously expedient that he should do so,

[a] See the notes to this Sermon.

in the case of a revelation being granted, as an evidence that the communication was *supernatural;* but the human mind, constituted as it is intellectually[b] and morally, could not consistently have admitted a given revelation to be *divine*, in which there had been the like violation of the laws of *truth* and of *morality.* A communication however witnessed, whose manifest tendency was that of subverting the distinctions in question, which, for instance, not through a perverse or doubtful interpretation of some obscurer passages of a volume teeming with the clearest declarations of the divine equity, but in its plain and collective sense represented the Deity as dooming his creatures absolutely and irrespectively to everlasting torments, must on the principle here maintained be regarded as not coming from him, of whose justice and goodness we are previously and by an independent process assured. A revelation must in like manner forfeit its claim to reception as divine, which called upon rational and moral creatures to perform, in order to their eternal well-being, not that which their Creator foresees will after all remain in many instances unexecuted, (for this is manifestly not irreconcileable with the perfections of the Deity,) but that which God has at the same time decreed shall not be effected or be not available. The conditions thus insisted on, far from erecting reason into an arbiter of the specific truths of revelation, or involving the in-

[b] "An omnis rationis usus circa revelationem eousque sit tollendus ut contradictoria etiam admitti possint atque debeant? "Negamus contra Judæos, Pontificios, et crassiores quosdam "Lutheranos." Lampe Theol. Elench. whence this passage is taken, might have enlarged the catalogue of his opponents.

correctness of an appeal to the doctrine on behalf of the miracle which attests it, concern themselves even with the rational and moral character of revelation, and with its moral contents, (which, properly speaking, it is no part of the object of miracles to prove,) only negatively. Presumable as it might be, that a revelation from God would take a particular and express account of the nature with which he had antecedently endowed the being to whom the revelation is addressed, that it would even abound with moral truth; yet is not this assumed; these conditions require only the absence of what is at variance with such truth, and might thus occasion a reasonable distrust of the doctrine having originated with the common author of truth of every kind, and who is himself essentially veracious. That it actually proceeds from him is to be otherwise and positively attested. Nor let it be thought that these limitations are either complex or onerous; that they militate against the express and obvious character already in this discourse assigned to revelation and its evidences. Of the preparation thus supposed to be indispensable, the Jews were already possessed. They had prior revelation, and they had therefore within reach the moral culture which such a revelation was fitted to induce and to promote; and in respect of the Gentile convert, who should be deficient in the same particulars, we might antecedently presume, and on the authoritative example of the apostle of the Gentiles we may assert, that the care of the appointed teachers of Christianity is appropriately directed to the eliciting the moral distinctions, to the putting such convert in possession of the natural and moral notions of a

Creator and Governor[b], or of confirming him in them, if already entertained. Particular cases, no doubt, may be supposed, where this preparation would be difficult; hardly more so, however, than an application to the direct and positive evidences, if they are to be intelligently entertained; while to the full apprehension and entertainment even of these, the preparation in question is indispensable. And the correct general proposition can be no other, than that in proportion only as references are actually made to truths thus properly antecedent, the belief, whether induced or not in this the proper order, will on the whole be adequate.

It is true the Deity so revealed himself to Adam and to the patriarchs, and at later periods also to those inspired persons who were intrusted with the communications of his will, as to leave no doubt in their own breasts with respect to *the quarter* whence such interpositions proceeded, and to render superfluous on their parts all inquiry as to the accordance of what was revealed with primary rational and moral truths; but the question here is not of what God has done under circumstances which no longer exist, and when the purposes for which that internal divine assurance was granted have been satisfied. Reason forbids not, and the Scriptures expressly authorize the supposition, that an infinitely wise and good Being may permit his creatures to be tempted in this respect as in others, since he has at the same time supplied them with faculties for discriminating in a far greater degree than

[b] In the same light may be regarded that moral training for doctrinal truths with which our Lord's discourses abound.

is here required between truth and falsehood, between good and evil. To the mass of persons who witnessed the miraculous attestations of Christianity, these presented themselves as a trial; and the circumstance of the period of the Advent being on the whole apparently the most enlightened which mankind since the fall had ever known, contributed perhaps to constitute the "fulness of time" when this trial would be best sustained, when he who was to resemble a "refiner's fire" might most appropriately present to the examination of mankind those doctrines and attestations, which were to prove the touchstone of the moral condition of their hearts and understandings. To the assumption, that God has never in fact permitted impostors or evil spirits to work *real* miracles, or exert a proper prescience, we may reply, that though the supposition of a genuine prophecy or miracle occurring on behalf of a doctrine that is false were purely abstract, yet since it is authorized by the thirteenth of Deuteronomy, it correctly may be made. The truths indeed hypothetically introduced there as contradicted by a false doctrine, and by that doctrine supernaturally attested, are those of a *prior revelation*, but they are also primary truths[c] of natural theology, are therefore of the cognisance not of revelation only, but also of reason. In the text and in its parallels no doubt is raised as to the fact of the miracle having been performed, nor does our Lord declare that the Deity alone worked *true* miracles. Injurious indeed to the po-

[c] "Let us *go after* other gods, which thou hast not known, "and let us *serve* them." Deut. xiii. 2. "To know whether ye "*love* the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your "soul." Ibid. verse 3.

sitive evidences of our faith would be the resting the question upon this issue, and maintaining that the senses may not be trusted; or, that the miracles of Christianity were not of so decisive and public a character but that the reality of them might be disputed by those who witnessed them. In refutation of such an objection, argument must have been alike unappropriate and unavailing. The charge made by the Jews against our Lord admitted of and even supposed the reality of his miracles; but ascribed them to a mistaken and undue source. Accordingly our Saviour, in his reply, insists not on the fact that such signal evidences of power had actually been displayed, but on their *design* and character. These, both in a general view, and specifically in the instance of a delivery from diabolic possession, were inconsistent with the notion of the miracles proceeding from Satan himself; from him whose influence they were counteracting; although, in defiance of common sense, they had, by a blind or wanton zeal, been imputed to this source. The case is not essentially different in the instance of prophecy. The prediction, in its accomplishment, is supposed to be designed by God to "prove"[d] the Israelites, not whether they could distinguish the casual agreement of prophecy with an event from a proper fulfilment, but whether they would allow a decidedly supernatural attestation, and which constituted therefore a proper moral trial, to seduce them from truths of which reason and revelation concurrently assured them, and from the duties which such truths involved. The principle is the same in both cases,

[d] "For the Lord your God *proveth* you, to know *whether ye* "*love* the Lord your God," &c. &c.

though in different and even opposite applications. The point to be determined was not the *reality* of the prediction or the miracle, but the quarter whence they emanated; and this was to be judged of by rational and moral and religious criteria.

To proceed: because miraculous attestations, consistently with what we discern of the general government of God, or indeed with the specific intention which these attestations are designed to answer, cannot be continuous and universal, another proof is unavoidably interposed in respect of the greater part of mankind, namely, *human* testimony. And as in the case of attestations professing to be from *God*, and in order to an intelligent reception of the proof so afforded, an appeal is supposed to certain primary tenets of natural theology, and to the intellectual and moral distinctions in which those tenets are founded; so in the case of *human* testimony, on behalf of the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures in which those divine attestations are recorded, on behalf of the events of prophecy, on behalf of the early and extensive success of Christianity, an ultimate foundation of our reliance on this method of proof is provided in the same distinctions. To assign a conventional origin to human testimony, is to deprive it of the proper validity arising out of its own intrinsic character, and of which truths of this importance especially have need. As the capacity, the instruction, the information which *enable* men to testify, or to speak what is true, are founded in distinctions properly intellectual; so does that other indispensable qualification, integrity, embrace distinctions that are as properly

moral; refers us to a principle of veracity which a moral character, in union with the intellectual one, can alone supply. Deduce the credibility of human testimony from any source short of this, and though it should still be thought applicable to the establishment of ordinary and secular facts, it is inadequate to the support of the weight which revelation imposes. Refer the principle itself exclusively to the positive source of revelation, and it can no longer be to this scheme the source of *independent* testimony. Familiarized indeed as is this sort of evidence to mankind by habit, and by a real adaptation to our nature, on which such habit is therefore readily induced, its primary origin may escape the notice of some, and may be demurred to by others, who, even where religion is concerned, afford to it an entire credit; who exemplify without appreciating its real character. The kingdom of heaven "gathers of "every kind," embraces every degree of mental power and acquirement, but the origin of testimony is not obscure. The check which conscience affords to the want of veracity in ourselves, and the reference which is thus suggested to the moral distinctions in our own case, are of easy transfer to the case of others; not less facile than is the reference to the *intellectual* apprehension of a witness in respect of his *capacity* and his *means* of testifying. And whoever carefully scrutinizes into the reasons which induce him to repose an absolute confidence in the cumulative testimony of which Christianity is possessed, will have no difficulty in discovering his ultimate security to exist, not in the *beauty* or *utility* of truth, or in the notions with which it may have become *associated;* not in *education* as in-

stilling, or *custom* as having confirmed the propriety of adhering to it, but in the moral impossibility of the concurrence of so many and such complex violations of the essentially veracious character of our proper nature, as the unfaithfulness of the testimonies in question would imply.

Such then is the primary connection between natural religion and revelation. Certain tenets of the former are preliminaries to the acknowledgment of the positive proofs on which revelation specifically reposes; are not so properly a portion of its evidences, as their foundation. The proofs of natural religion would exist, although supernatural communications from the Deity had never been made; but those of revelation cannot in like manner obtain a proper footing in the human mind, independently of the aid which natural and moral truths afford towards rendering intelligible and worthy of belief the fact of its having been imparted. And if, as experience confirms, a certain degree of previous culture of the mind must, in any such systematic views of religious truth as I now am taking, be supposed, the assumption, that the human faculties, when thus awakened to their appointed functions, may be brought to acknowledge and even to elicit in some degree these fundamental verities, is, as in the two last discourses was seen, a reasonable one; and it is actually justified by Scripture authority. No doubt, these preliminaries to positive proof should be reduced to the simplest form and within the narrowest compass consistent with the intelligent admission of the revelation to which they are introductory; but when so presented, they claim not merely

a tacit or reluctant acquiescence in them. They demand a primary and permanent place in our exhibitions of the evidences; they are essential to such portion of them as is merely positive; and facilitate, not obstruct the direct and immediate purposes of an express communication.

II. The way thus cleared through natural and moral truth for the intelligent reception of the positive evidences to revelation, natural religion, whether its truths be contemplated as subsisting in revelation, or as they exist independently, maintains yet other bonds of connection with that scheme, which alike have suffered by disregard and by over-statement. And,

First, Its truths, *as actually incorporated in the sacred volume*, possess the relation of evidence with the positive testimonies; and when united to facts, with the scheme itself of revelation.

Secondly, Natural religion, *considered as an independent system*, connects itself with the character and contents of the same revealed scheme in another and further respect than the fundamental one which has been now at large contemplated.

And in regard to the first of these sources of evidence, it will be necessary to remove much extraneous matter, with which the approach to it has been encumbered, before we can arrive at a perception of the proper character of the proof which may be hence derived. On the wise and honest principle then of not straining evidence beyond what it will bear, the natural and moral truths subsisting

in the volume of revelation, *when singly taken*, must be pronounced incapable of supplying a proper internal evidence of its divine origin, or even of its truth. For let it be considered what the footing is on which the truths of natural religion, as found in revelation, subsist there. An internal evidence no doubt there is of the scheme of revelation, and of the Scriptures severally arising out of the relations of their parts, out of their accordance direct and incidental; and which supposes no other external reference than to the principle that truth must be consistent, that it will even be found coherent and harmonious. Towards this evidence natural and moral truth, as will be seen hereafter[c], *when united* with other internal particulars, contributes. But here the inquiry is, what evidence such truth, *when singly viewed*, is capable of affording. Again; not only an accession of strength accrues to many of the particulars concurring to form such proper internal evidence of the Scriptures, but a distinct relation of truths, and a separate[d] ground of proof are induced, when particulars which are contributory to that internal evidence have been verified by a reference to external and independent sources. Here the question is of an evidence of this last sort; of an agreement between natural and moral truth as subsisting in revelation, and some external standard by which such exhibitions of it as revelation is seen to afford may be estimated. This standard natural religion, as independently established, supplies. But that from natural and moral truth, as

[c] Page 217.

[d] This separate ground of proof is often confounded with the proper internal evidence arising from the harmony of the parts of revelation or of the Scriptures.

subsisting in revelation, and from the moral character which pervades the scheme, and from these as authenticated by an external standard, we cannot conclude to the *general* claims of revelation itself to truth or to a divine origin, will be evident from the following considerations;

Revelation may be considered as an *event* contingently occurring, or as a *scheme* of truths and duties.

As an *event*, it requires positive testimony of its having actually occurred, of the revelation having in fact been made; but natural religion, though grounded in actual existence, in that of the material, the intellectual, the moral world, and consisting in part of truths of that description, is nevertheless a deduction of reason. By this process it is able to induce from contingent being the existence of Him whose being is necessary[c] and underived; and from the fact or reality of our own intellectual and moral capacities, the correspondent attributes in the Deity; but whether the Being at whose existence and character natural theology thus arrives has vouchsafed any positive revelation to mankind, this is the question of a contingent *occurrence*, of which neither reasoning nor moral considerations are of a nature to afford a proper evidence. The verification of natural and moral truths, as existing in revelation by a reference to their correspondent external source in natural religion, has no tendency to prove a contingent event, for natural religion itself is incompetent to the proof of it.

[c] In what sense and with what limitations I apply the term "necessary" to the existence of the Deity, will be seen more fully in the Notes.

Again: revelation is a scheme of *truths*, but then it is of truths not made out to us by reason, but expressly and authoritatively communicated. Although therefore natural religion furnishes the means of proving by reason the *truth* of *so much* of the contents of revelation as is ultimately referable to natural and moral principles; and although the circumstance of such natural and moral truths being found incorporated in revelation, and of their partaking by consequence of its positive foundation, disqualifies them not from tendering (in virtue of the other and independent grounds in natural religion itself, on which they ultimately rest,) such contributions to revelation as they otherwise may be capable of, yet does it not follow from the *truth* of this part of the contents of revelation, that such part has been *expressly revealed*, that it is from God otherwise than as all truth proceeds from him; and in respect of another portion of the contents of revelation, namely, its *specific* and *peculiar* tenets, natural religion cannot even ascertain their *truth*, and is still more unprovided with the means of proving their origin to be *divine*. Various analogies indeed, derivable from the natural and moral world, prepare in some degree for such an event as revelation; obviate objections to the nature and amount of its proofs, and even to some of its specific truths and facts, when once it has been afforded: but if the evidence that even such parts of revelation as natural religion can shew to be probable or true have also been divinely promulgated, must be elsewhere sought, yet more must such other source of evidence be requisite for truths of which natural religion has altogether no proper cognisance.

That natural religion is without the means of supplying such evidence even to the truths which ultimately are referable to its scheme, will be further evident, if we reflect that the introduction of such truths into a revelation not otherwise authenticated as divine, must unavoidably be liable to the imputation of an authority purely human. Improbable no doubt would be the supposition, that the representations of the Deity and of ethical truth, and the purity of character by which the Scriptures are distinguished, should be the produce of mere human effort. To discover and to appreciate when discovered, is confessedly not the same thing. Still we are without the means of determining absolutely that the trial of human reason in regard to the truths of natural religion has been complete; and what can be ascertained and deduced by reason may, through the same instrumentality, have been excogitated. The premises, whether as derivable from the visible creation, or from our own constitution, or from observation of the moral government of God, lie within our reach; the faculty for deducing them is also ours: the grounds therefore on which we recognise the accuracy of the exhibitions of natural and moral truth which a professed revelation may present, the means through which we attain to such a recognition may have sufficed for the discovery. In consequence, the judicious advocate of revealed truth, who exercises a requisite jealousy in regard to the materials of evidence which he admits, although alive to the *moral* impressions which the internal *character* of revelation is fitted to produce, will, in proportion as he is so, be on his guard, lest he should not sufficiently discriminate be-

tween these and the *intellectual* grounds on which a sound conviction must be rested; will avoid hazarding any portion of evidence in the present case on what high-wrought sentimental notions may dictate; or even on the opposite improbabilities, however strong; on what theory or experience may inculcate in respect of the degree in which the human mind is capable of bringing its powers into exercise on such subjects, and of the limited success with which such efforts have been hitherto attended. In short, he will perceive and admit, that natural and moral *truth*, as forming part of a religious scheme, cannot, in virtue of its intrinsic character, evidence the *fact* of such scheme having been revealed; or obviate the objection, that for its own introduction there, it *may* have been indebted to the operations of human reason.

Aware of the second[f] of these difficulties, but not possessed, it would seem, of a sufficiently discriminative sense of it, writers, who would erect the natural and moral truths of revelation, and the character arising out of them, into a distinct source of evidence, have applied themselves to its removal, sometimes by lending to the Scripture ethics an air of *strangeness* and of paradox; at others by extracting from the sacred volume such particulars of morals, as might seem to approach the nearest to the description of proper *discoveries*. In regard to the first of these attempts, even if a character of strangeness could be admitted to belong to the moral parts of holy writ, yet would its existence defeat the pur-

[f] Whether they are aware of the *first* of the fundamental objections here stated cannot be known, since they have not encountered it.

pose that is intended by the supposal of it; for though an *extraordinary* character might be expected to distinguish an express revelation from God, yet the presence of such a character, singly taken, has no tendency to prove the divine origin, or even the truth of a given scheme. And where morals are concerned, it has an expressly contrary one. For the basis principally[g] on which the moral *contents* of a revelation, or any portion of them, can rest a claim to the character of evidence, is their conformity, we have seen, to some standard of which we previously are possessed, and by which they are to be appreciated; their conformity to the standard which the creation generally, which our proper nature and the moral government of God supply. In proportion therefore as the truths subsisting in revelation are represented as receding from this standard, they decline at the same time from the test by which their capacity (if moral truth as such should possess any) for contributing to the evidences must be verified. On this same account such representations of them would not only disserve the cause on behalf of which they are immediately adduced, but must be essentially false; and so to exhibit the moral parts either of the Jewish or the Christian revelation is egregiously to misrepresent them. Other advocates of the same internal evidence have contented them-

[g] The only exception, the only instance where natural and moral truth as found in revelation, and as contributory to evidence, has not *necessarily* and *in every point* a reference to the standard of natural religion as independently subsisting, is one which affects not the present case; namely, where the question is of the harmony of the parts or of a purely internal evidence. Even in this case the natural and moral contents of revelation do not "recede "from the standard" of natural religion, only there is no immediate reference to it in order to such harmony.

selves with deriving it from the last named source; from certain points which, in their representations of them, are neither so aliene from what natural and moral data supply as not to be recognised by us when exhibited, while yet they cannot be distinctly shewn to have presented themselves to the attention of mankind antecedently to the Advent. And though the selection of these points has not always been judicious, yet that such truths, or rather such modifications of moral truth, there are, may properly be granted; but then the fundamental objection already stated, and which embraces not merely the question of what has been, but of what considerably within the limits of moral possibility *might* be discovered by purely human means, is not thus obviated. And the arguments on behalf of an internal evidence of revelation, as arising out of such truths of natural religion as are to be found there, and out of the moral character consequent on them, are reducible to this dilemma: either these truths and this character must be allowed to retain their hold on natural and moral principles, and then we have no adequate criterion for determining whether the human mind might not deduce them from those principles; or in proportion as they are displaced from that foundation they cease to have a proper and independent existence; are incapable thenceforward of contributing to the proof of revelation; remain in the number of those specific discoveries of revelation which themselves have need to be evidenced.

But if, for the substantial reasons now assigned, something distinct from what reasonings on a material or moral basis can furnish is required on behalf of the *contingent fact* of revelation having been made;

if again the natural and moral verities of revelation, not from any doubt which exists concerning them, but partly from the very circumstance of the independent means we have of making out their proper existence, cannot of themselves supply an available internal evidence either to the general truth, or to the divine origin of revelation itself, if out of this their incompetency when singly taken arises an argument on behalf of positive and miraculous attestations, may not those truths, when contemplated as a part of revelation, so coalesce with other points as to partake of the character of proof? No doubt. Over accumulated testimony, over well attested facts, over supernatural witnessings, the human mind has no such controul as it exercises in regard to the employment of truths deducible more or less by reason; and through an union with what is thus *positive* and *actual*, natural and moral truths, as subsisting in revelation, and yet more as themselves authenticated by reference to an independent standard, may afford no mean support to the evidences; as well by their influence on the specific attestations to revelation, as also by contributing to supply new grounds of proof, or to fortify those already existing.

And first, they add to the credibility of the *specific testimonies* to revelation. For although, as it has been already observed, natural and moral truths themselves receive a divine attestation from the positive evidences of revelation in virtue of their subsistence within that specific scheme, yet since they possess another, a primary, an wholly distinct foundation in natural religion as independently subsisting, the contributions which they furnish to the credibility of testimony are afforded in a sense and in respects

essentially different from those in which they themselves have incidentally been witnessed. If therefore, to illustrate by instances, we connect the probability, derivable from the divine attributes as exhibited in Scripture, of revelation being bestowed, with the positive attestations that it has in fact been granted, these are seen to acquire an additional claim to our admission of them; and this claim is farther strengthened by these attestations being afforded to a scheme not merely not discordant from natural and moral notions, (this was a preliminary point already insisted on in the early part of the present discourse as *indispensable*,) but copiously illustrative of what the natural and moral dispensations of the Deity would teach, or would intelligently sanction in regard to the Supreme Being who has so attested, and in regard to the character by which many of the attestations are themselves distinguished. Thus also in respect of *human* testimony. Its force is augmented when applied to the authentication of a volume whose internal character is singularly pure, which specifically condemns all such departures from the *principle of veracity*, as must in a long succession of independent instances have occurred before that volume could be falsified. If from the union of the natural and moral truths of revelation with its *positive testimonies*, we pass on to a similar alliance of them with *facts*, the result will be evidence; evidence created or increased by such conjunction. Allied to ordinary but well attested *facts*, those truths will contribute to proof; allied to *Scripture* facts, they will contribute to constitute a *proper* INTERNAL[h] *evidence*. Thus the early and extensive success of Christianity, and of this as proceeding

[h] See page 209.

from a country little regarded at the general seat of empire, the religious and moral change consequent on the Advent, and the era produced in religion, theoretic and practical, by what certain obscure and unlearned persons taught, when joined to the internal consideration of the disinterested features of Christianity, of a character which courts not, but restrains the inferior and concupiscible part of our nature, which instead of seeking undue favour with a corrupt world, contains doctrines humiliating to human pride, and imposes duties unpalatable to a depraved nature; these facts and this internal character unitedly contemplated, cease altogether to be explicable by purely human means. In a detached state the high moral excellence and adaptation to the better part of our nature of the scheme of Christianity prove nothing; but they become capable of a proper testimony to the *supernatural character* of the results in which this scheme has issued, when coupled with the *facts* by which those results are established. Thus again; and to select an instance of evidence altogether *created* by such union, where none, *on either hand*, would otherwise have existed. Neither the natural and moral truths of revelation, nor the condition of the Jew and Gentile at the time of their promulgation, severally viewed, furnish any evidence; but, connected, they evince that the degree of religious and moral attainment subsisting in the world at the periods when the various portions of the Sacred volume were indited, could not without the divine assistance have sufficed for the contemporaneous production of such truths, theological and moral, as holy writ exhibits. Thus lastly; as an instance of the union of *Scripture* facts with moral character, it is hardly possible to read our

Lord's discourses, and contemplate his religious and moral demeanour as represented in the Gospels, without receiving, abstractedly from doctrinal facts, an impression, that in such consummate excellence there was something more than mortal; while yet there is a reality, an adherence to nature and moral truth, in those representations, which satisfies us, that this Person both lived on earth, and was clothed with our form and character. On these anticipations, it is true, nothing in the way of proof could be safely rested; but what a preparative, or corroboration, as the case may be, is thus supplied to the Scripture facts of the union of the divine and human natures in the one person of Jesus; of his having been made "like unto his brethren;" of his having been "tempted like as we are, but without sin;" while yet he who "was made flesh and dwelt among "us," was "the Word," the "only begotten of the "Father," the "Son of God" in a proper sense.

Natural and moral truths then, and the internal character thence accruing to the revealed scheme with which they are incorporated, have need to be associated with testimony or with fact, in order to their contributing to the evidences of revelation; unless indeed the question be of mere internal harmony, which may be derived from the union of natural and moral truth with *Scripture doctrine*.

We have now been considering the relations of natural and moral truth as *subsisting in revelation*, with the general scheme in which they are found; and such truths were seen to owe much of the capacity they[1] possess of contributing to the evidences of

[1] *Much* of the capacity, not all; see note, page 214.

that scheme, to the circumstance of their other and independent foundation in natural religion, of which they at the same time form a part. Antecedently[k], and with a view to certain preliminary points of connection, natural religion, contemplated as *an independent system*, had been brought into relation with the positive evidences of revealed truth, at the very foundations of which they in effect exist, and also with its intellectual and moral character.

It remains to *carry on*, as was proposed[l], the view taken of natural religion as an *independent system*, to those points of contact which it possesses not with the character only, but with the contents of revelation. And as the fundamental relation[m] already established between the truths of the one scheme, and the positive testimonies and character of the other, though indispensable to the due reception of these last, constituted not, it was seen, a proper evidence on behalf of revelation, so the general disability in this respect, which has since been shewn to attach to the truths of natural religion whenever they are not united with positive proof or with fact, must still continue. There will indeed be now no question of the second[n] of the objections stated: this applies only to the truths of natural religion as *found in revelation*, and contemplated as subsisting there; whilst it is with natural and moral truth as subsisting *out of that scheme*, and as brought *independently* into relation with the aggregate of truths of whatever description which constitutes revelation, that I am here concerned: but the first objection which arises[o] out of the essential character of natural reli-

[k] See page 198, et seq. [l] See page 208.
[m] See page 198. [n] See page 212. [o] See page 210.

gion remains unabated, and suffices to disqualify its truths from affording of themselves any proper and substantial *evidence* to the cause of revelation. In consequence, the relation of natural religion to revealed, now to be contemplated, though real, and though extending itself to a great variety of particulars, both in respect of the scheme and the specific truths of revelation, will be seen to amount only to *Consonance.* In so far as the schemes co-extend, they unite in producing, amid numerous subordinate points of mutual illustration, common results; they concur in exhibiting the moral will of the Deity, which, amid whatever variety in its application, must, we are assured, be under every dispensation essentially the same; and this consonance of truths as positively communicated with those of natural religion, of which we have a distinct, and in the proper order of things an antecedent assurance, has a bearing on the truth of revelation. Although not itself composing proper evidence, it facilitates the conviction independently accruing from the proofs by which this scheme is established, that it has a supernatural origin, and is from God.

And the contributions to the evidences which in this view natural religion is capable of affording, may be contemplated as they regard the *fact* of revelation having been granted, its *scheme*, or its particular *truths.* That natural and moral considerations render probable the *actual grant* of it, has been already observed; that they illustrate its scheme and its particulars, and assist their credibility, are points on which it may be proper to enlarge.

In regard to the *scheme* of revelation, we have

seen in a former[p] discourse that divine interpositions are incidents in the general economy of the Deity; and the plan of man's redemption, large as is the space it occupies in that economy, has the same specific character. The Scriptures acquaint us not, and human conjectures we may have leave to disregard, what *extraordinary*[q] assistance was afforded to man while upright; and though subsequently to the fall more immediate and more frequent supernatural communications would seem to have been vouchsafed before than after the granting of the written law, yet at no time was revelation, like moral truth, essential to our nature, or proper to the character of the human mind. The Christian scheme, though involving an habitual reference to both, takes not its rise from these, but from an event posterior to the creation of that nature, and in itself contingent, the abuse of a state already subsisting. Nor again, is revelation permanent, like the moral law, which must ever be applicable to beings possessed of the character wherein that law has a foundation, and which, as on the highest authority we are assured, will be in fact perpetual. Now natural religion, from this its relative condition, is qualified to assist in rendering intelligible the occasion, the object, and the character of revelation. The lapse of Adam, as related in the Scriptures, is seen to have originated in a violation of that primary dictate of moral law, obedience to his Maker, and the plan of redemption to have had for its object the security of that law, an acceptable obedience to it on our parts, and the restoration of mankind to happiness, which is already the natural object of our desires, a restoration through acts and habits of virtue, as at once the qualification

[p] Sermon IV. sub init. [q] See the notes to this Sermon.

for felicity and the condition of it. Moral means, it is true, were insufficient to restore; hence the extraordinary features of the remedy provided; but the very need of an atonement, and of the spiritual assistance which revelation proffers, and the divine love displayed in the act of redemption itself, and in the specific means employed, would be very imperfectly made out, could not be suitably received and applied, if the nature of sin itself in some degree, if the actual helplessness of our state, if our own habitual offendings, were not ascertained by the independent existence of a moral standard; as again the nature of redemption could hardly be understood, if the mediatory principle, as exhibited in the natural and moral government of God, were not familiar to us. Further: the ultimate merging of the mediatorial kingdom of Christ in the general divine economy, the final conquest over sin and death, and the restoration of the order of God's government which sin had interrupted, are strikingly in accordance with moral notions. Then, the most signal of all testimonies is borne to the moral law by Him, through whose intervention the extraordinary remedy was supplied; in his being "made under" this law not less than under the ceremonial, and becoming voluntarily subject to its penalties; in his sacrifice and obedience, in his moral teaching, in his perfect exemplification of the duties he enjoined. Neither amid the positive provisions which the scheme of redemption contains, nor throughout its process, are the moral attributes of the Deity, or the moral distinctions lost sight of. On the contrary, in proportion as revelation unfolds itself, these are seen to have been the primary and antecedent truths out of which arose the need of redemption,

and with reference to which revelation is conducted; and moral terms are employed, not less to designate the character of the Gospel scheme and of the divine proceedings under it, than to express the duties which it imposes on ourselves.

If from the scheme itself we pass on to the particular truths contained in it, the same consonance may be discerned, and the same light is thrown consequently from natural and moral truths on revelation. Thus are they seen to prepare for revealed verities, or to secure their more adequate reception, where they are not, strictly speaking, fundamental to them.

1. Natural religion discovers, for instance, those anomalies of God's moral government which revelation more distinctly explains to belong to a state of probation; the anticipations of natural religion that these anomalies will ultimately disappear, revelation ratifies: the sense of accountableness, the intimations through conscience of a design to reward and punish, in conformity to certain moral differences, and the rule of conscience[r], which through these distinctions is supplied, prepare for the adoption of those very distinctions by revelation, and for an ultimate and universal judgment, which is to be conformable to them; prepare in some respect, through the notion of retribution, for the unmerited happiness held out in the Gospel, and for this as dependent on our present conduct. Then the Gospel re-

[r] Fanaticism, confounding the rule of faith with the rule of conscience, has but one guide, the Scriptures, and takes of this rule only what pleases it; infidelity professes to abide by the rule which natural religion furnishes, and keeps to it as little. Happy those who unite and abide by both rules.

quires repentance as fundamental, and this condition could not be complied with, could not be intelligible, if the natural workings of conscience, which penitence involves, were not antecedently the object of our knowledge and experience.

2. Great light is thrown even on the doctrinal facts of revelation by their being seen to possess a character correspondent to moral truth, and to furnish specific grounds to moral obligation; to supply, amid essential modifications of the circumstances under which we act, new relations that open a wider field for moral exercise; and these additional duties may often in no inconsiderable degree be traced, when once the doctrines themselves have been communicated. Sometimes there is a moral groundwork which revelation adopts, on which it erects its specific truths, to whose appropriate religious consequences it secures the due effect. Thus life and immortality are not for the first time taught in the Gospel, but are "brought to light by it;" thus moral action, and the freedom which is essential to it; the moral government of the mind, and subjection of the appetites and passions; the hatefulness of sin; the inseparable connection between virtue and happiness, and between their contraries, are involved in that signal instance of the abuse of moral liberty, the fall of Adam, in its remedy, in the precepts and the exhortations, the promises and the threats, in the arguments and motives and sanctions by which the Scriptures would engage us not to resist the means of restoration. Thus the graces of the Holy Spirit, of which our moral nature feels the need, are in ordinary periods universally of a

character, and are tendered in a way consistent with the same freedom, and suppose an active employment of it for moral and religious purposes. Thus also the indistinct hopes of mercy derivable from the attributes of God are supplied by revelation with a specific ground on which such hopes may be entertained in larger measure and with greater clearness.

3. There are seemingly inconsistent representations in holy writ of the character of human nature. Now natural religion deduces from its own independent premises the same apparent contrarieties, and thus materially elucidates and confirms the representations of Scripture. It verifies both the proper tendencies of our nature, and also the actual inability which revelation asserts, and of which it furnishes the reason. But the struggle in the breast of the unregenerate person between proneness to evil and the consciousness of moral obligation, which St. Paul, in the seventh of the Romans, pourtrays, cannot be properly apprehended by those who deny the existence of a moral character in man, or admit not its deterioration, of both which the apostle in that chapter presents the indications; or who in equal disregard of what the human character, when not wilfully silenced, still might teach them, exclude the very notion of an inward *combat*, by representing the depravation from the fall as total.

4. A Consonance even in difficulties which revelation has not solved, supplies an occasion to natural religion of contributing to its service. Thus,

although even under revealed light we are still unable to establish the proper point of agreement between the controul of Providence and man's free will, between the divine prescience and the contingency of human action, yet may we thus see the greater reason to acquiesce in difficulties which appear to be of the province of reason, while yet the human faculties, independently exercised on these subjects, have been found incapable of determining them. At the same time, the primary truths of which we are abundantly assured, and which would authorize the denial of a divine authority to miracles that should attest what contravenes them, are fitted in their consequences to secure us against such partial interpretations of the Scriptures in regard to those unfathomable points as might interfere with some truth of natural religion, and so involve manifest error; against such interpretations as the analogy of faith, claimed as it is on all hands, does not suffice to silence, and as would set at variance truths which we know not indeed how to reconcile, but which are perceived at the same time to be not contradictory.

5. Even the imperfection of our notions of natural and moral truth, and the insufficiency of that truth in respect of a fallen creature, are fitted to create the desire of fuller views; of assurances of forgiveness, which natural religion cannot supply; of a knowledge of the terms and means of it; of sanctions and assistances, which revelation satisfies. Natural religion thus facilitates the admission of the specific communications of revelation, bears testimony of their appropriateness to purposes for which they were already seen to be needed.

Indeed, so essential are the truths of natural religion to the securing a due reception of revealed truth, that this last scheme assumes them as more or less understood and acknowledged; appeals to and employs them; adopts the data of reason and of morals as the necessary groundwork of its specific applications; regards equally both Jew and Gentile as intellectual and as moral agents.

In these and numerous other instances, natural religion, as independently subsisting, illustrates the truths of revelation; enables us to perceive, as interwoven with this scheme, a character properly moral; adapted, that is, in those parts of it which contain the subject-matter of natural religion, to our proper nature; adapted in its doctrinal parts to that nature as altered by the fall, but as still retaining intelligent and moral capacities, which must be taken as the ultimate groundwork of any scheme for its restoration.

And since no testimony can certify to us more clearly and fully than by consciousness and observation we are assured of our possessing an intelligent and moral character; as it was not the specific purpose of revelation to convey to us such assurance, or to inform us of those primary truths which reason can deduce from it, but to assert or suppose such foundations, and to build on them[1], the relative position of natural religion and of revelation, when thus exhibited in consonance, becomes determined. And *this last scheme* properly acquires additional security from its connection with a prior

[1] See as *decisive* on this point, St. Paul's discourse at Athens, already treated of in the sixth of these Sermons.

and distinct one; with one fitted to assist in rendering it intelligible and credible, in procuring for it from mankind an adequate reception, in proportion as they have cultivated natural and moral truth, of which they are independently the proper subjects.

What then is the conclusion which we shall be justified in adopting, in regard to the connection of natural with revealed religion, in reference to the evidences? So much plainly of natural religion has with this view need to be maintained and introduced, as can be shewn to lie at the foundations of revelation, and to be indispensable to the apprehension and adoption of its positive attestations, and to the appreciation of its intellectual and moral character—so much as when incorporated in revelation, although unequal of itself to prove, yet acquires this capacity by an union with positive testimony, or with facts—so much as prepares for the fact and is consonant to the scheme and the particulars of revelation, and thus assists the human mind in comprehending and embracing them.

Nor are the results of this connection only positive. The absence of a proper sense of it may be traced alike in the inclinations towards fanaticism and towards infidelity; towards the extreme of rejecting natural religion altogether, and so depriving revelation of a necessary foundation and of a support; towards the extreme of an undue exaltation of natural religion at the expence of a revealed system, which throws great reflex light on natural and moral truths, and gives to them a *positive* and *divine* confirmation; gives such confirmation, it has been

seen, in perfect consistency with its being itself supported by those truths, in respect of so much of its own contents as have in natural religion a test and standard.

Let it not be said then, that the contributions to the evidences of revelation arising out of a proper existence of natural religion, and out of certain relations of it with revealed truth, when both have been incontestably established, may be dispensed with as not worth contending for, or under an opposite aspect as not satisfying natural and moral claims. Intelligent and conscientious inquirers into the evidences, such as I am here supposing, will not hold themselves at liberty arbitrarily to admit or to reject the relations of truths in whatever degree subsisting; they will judge, that where demonstration is unattainable, we cannot be possessed of too many holds on moral probability; they will be aware, that by the aggregate force of particulars, and by this alone, probable evidence in its results can dispute the palm with demonstrative; and they will not consent to be deprived of that intimate conviction of the truth of revelation, which arises from contributions to the evidences whose foundation is in our nature, and that supply a character of intelligence, as well as an increase of force, to the positive attestations. At the same time, beyond what these premises furnish they will not advance; they will not indeed so commit themselves, in respect of the extent of their views, as to confine them to purely relative notions; will not forbear to carry up the moral distinctions to the Deity, and to ascribe to Him a moral character in an absolute

sense[1]: for though not of the incommunicable attributes of God, yet of the moral it is provided we should have a distinct apprehension, such as satisfies us, that though much may exist in the divine nature of which we have no conception, yet nothing is there essentially at variance with moral notions. In other respects, whether the question be of the Deity himself, or of the specific scheme of redemption which he has vouchsafed to communicate, they will direct their attention to those relative views which principally in effect concern us, and which probable proof is especially fitted to supply. When by the conspiring force of natural and moral with positive evidence they are become convinced that a revelation is from God, they will not delude themselves with the notion, that even from those parts of it which have a proper connection with natural religion, they can ascend to any absolute and universal conclusions in regard to the divine character or counsels. Much is there in the scheme of revelation, of which on natural and moral grounds we can render no account. Enough we can discern for an increased abhorrence of sin; enough for gratitude; enough to incite us not to render ineffectual, as to ourselves, those universal ends for which so much has been both done and suffered; but lamentably should we err in the imagination, that the full designs of Providence, even as they respect the Christian redemption, have been laid open to us. Were this really the case, *difficulties* which now receive a proper temporary solution from the consideration that we see only in part, would assume the appearance of *objections* absolutely *irremoveable;* and revelation

[1] See the Notes to this Sermon.

itself is so far from professing to present us with such views, that it expressly reprehends the presumption that would aspire to them. Under the like impression of the imperfection on these subjects of our utmost knowledge, we shall not indulge the dream of an antecedent necessity for the specific plan of our redemption, such as scholastics of old and enthusiasts of all times have with opposite views imagined; shall not reduce revelation from an abundantly attested fact to the mere exhibition in action of natural and moral truths, and its evidences to moral arguments; nor sacrifice what is properly of the province of natural religion to the notion of an arbitrary or merely positive communication.

It is by the observance of this mean that the interests of truths of each description are consulted. As revelation derives from its connection with natural and moral verities not only material confirmation in other respects, but also a support and illustration to its specific testimonies; as the human mind, constituted as it is, and in proportion to its actual culture, dwells not satisfactorily amid truths and proofs as positively communicated, if detached from their essential relations to our nature; so by the undue stress not unfrequently laid on the proof derivable from this quarter, the positive evidences of revelation are in their turn depreciated. This mean therefore is not a temporising expedient, such as is sometimes mistakenly employed to reconcile difficulties; such as leaves them in their full force, and even adds to it; but it is the middle point, where proofs of both descriptions, with the *greatest* effect, and *fullest* bearings on revelation, may meet; it

has therefore the proper moderation and self-evidence of truth itself.

And is the hope a vain one, that such chastised and temperate notions may, at this advanced period of the inquiry into the evidences, be more extensively embraced than they have been heretofore? On either part, zeal for the interests of revelation is pretended, and no doubt is felt; and zeal in such a cause can offend only by its quality. Let this be what the cause demands, and views such as have been now presented will afford it an appropriate exercise. Instead of engaging on their side the prejudices and partialities of the human mind, they will exact a diligent internal scrutiny for the purpose of dispossessing them; they will suppose them to yield to the principle of admitting, to disappear amid the actual reception of whatever the Deity can in any way be shewn to have communicated; amid a reception of truth and proof strictly commensurate with the evidence, of whatever kind, for its having in fact proceeded from him. Our embracing of these views involves what to the most zealous advocates of the faith may sometimes afford an abundant employment, (though to honest zeal it ought not to be a distasteful one,) the excluding from their religious theories all fancy, self-will, and affection; and the placing themselves under the paramount direction of intellect and conscience, as the appointed human securities for the impartiality of their views, and for the spirit and temper in which those views are advocated.

"If Satan be divided against himself, his king-

" dom cannot stand;" and if error may be thus consistent, how much more the truth! Our Lord, by the reality and the benevolent character of his miracles, in some instances by their specific object, opposed himself to the author of falsehood and of evil. By connecting the positive attestations with truth and moral goodness, he more than fulfilled the *condition* requisite to the reception of miracles as a properly *divine* attestation. Through the same connection of *positive proof* and of *facts*, doctrinal and other, with *natural and moral truth*, and with a converse and an example having an essentially moral character, he supplied to revelation the evidence which in this discourse has been seen to derive from such an union; while at the same time he thus manifested the *consonance* of revelation in the complex with what He who gave us our nature has through this channel enabled us to perceive of truth, of ethical distinction, of his own existence and moral attributes. The materials of evidence, as they are referable to positive and to moral sources, equally pervade revelation. Shall we not then beware of disconnecting what He, who best knew the nature of man, and the relations it should have with his Gospel, has united? He claimed not indeed to be believed, unless he " did the works of the Father;" but a specific appeal to the *moral* as well as to the *intellectual* capacity with which the Father has endowed our nature, he at the same time instituted; " Which of you convinceth me of *sin?* And if I say " the *truth*, why do ye not believe me[m]?"

[m] John viii. 46.

SERMON VIII.

JOHN XX. 29.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

THE relation between truths and the evidence by which they are established is various. In demonstrative science it is absolute and necessary; in *sensible* proof, the process of reason which connects that species of evidence with ordinary secular truths is short, and the previous knowledge required for the purpose of correctly appreciating the connection lies often within small compass. Even where the question is of *religious* truth, and of sensible but *supernatural* attestations to it, the preliminary verities requisite to the rendering *intelligible* such manifestations, it has been seen, are few; nor is the difficulty great, of ascertaining the absence of self-contradiction, and of disagreement with primary natural and moral notions in the subject-matter to be evidenced. Further: no proper occasion of doubt is created, when between the truths themselves and ocular proof of them is introduced a dependence on *human* veracity; when recourse is become necessary to the testimony of our fellow-creatures on behalf of the fact, that to certain truths miraculous wit-

nessings had in the first instance been afforded. So definite and conclusive is the character of positive evidence, that a very small number of capable and honest witnesses suffices to establish the existence of facts and of attestations surpassing the limits of ordinary experience; especially if these be supported by the character of the truths attested, by the circumstances under which the attestations were given, and by the consequences in which they are ascertained to have terminated. And if we suppose the human testimony to be cumulative, and to have arisen in some instances from independent quarters, in others to have proceeded from persons prejudiced against the truths whose divine attestations nevertheless they certify and admit, we have the positive evidence which has in fact been borne to revelation. The like testimony as afforded to prophecy has a yet further advantage. For not only is prophecy, from the gradual and successive accomplishment of its parts, what Pascal and others have termed it, a permanent miracle, but human testimony to an *ordinary* event, when that event is the completion of a Scripture prediction, assures us of what in the result is supernatural.

It is the precise and determinate character which thus belongs to positive evidence, that has gone far towards securing it from those mistaken views, which in respect of other portions of probable proof have been generated by an unintelligent zeal for the interests of revelation. The error within the pale of Christianity in regard to positive proof has been less that of tampering with the parts, than of unduly exalting or depressing this branch of evidence alto-

gether; and even the inequalities in the views thus aggregately taken of it have been regulated by an external circumstance; by the degree in which the contributions of natural and moral truth to the same great cause of religious evidence have been recognised or disallowed. For as it is in this last department of evidence that the moral latitude inseparable from probable proof as such has the largest field for exercise, and consequently for abuse, it is here in fact that the leading instances of error in regard to the evidences of religion, and which involve a proportionate incorrectness in the treatment of positive proof, originate. On these accounts it is that in the preceding discourses your attention has been invited specifically to that branch of the evidences which is supplied by natural religion, whose existence has been maintained in that moderate but pertinent and available sense, which its distinct and definite foundations were to authorize.

At the same time, although the essential nature of truths, as thus asserted and applied, could not have been affected by the subordinate and incidental consideration of the degree in which, amid the varying circumstances of a lapsed creature, such truths had, by the unassisted human powers, been discovered or been brought into exercise; yet because considerable stress had been laid upon these incidents, it was expedient to set right the fact; to exhibit truths of these descriptions as not wholly dormant, under the greatest apparent disadvantages, and as emerging under more favourable circumstances, in a degree far beyond what was necessary to establish their proper relation to the hu-

man mind even on the footing of experience. Then this existence of natural religion, and the actual operations of the human mind with reference to it, were confirmed by express authorities of holy writ, not constrained to a support of such senses as the occasion required, but cautiously and consistently derived from text and context. Lastly, the contributions to revelation of the truths whose independence had been thus both absolutely and in a relative sense maintained, were reduced within those limits which the character of revelation, and the definite views already taken of the truths themselves, concurred in prescribing; and the connection was in consequence seen to be comprised within the characters of a foundation—of conditions—of a coalescence with positive evidence or with facts, in order to a common proof of revelation; and lastly, of consonance, whence arises an united reference to the One Great Author of both systems, and additional support and illustration to revealed truth.

It will be remembered, however, that the *treatment* which natural and moral truths, considered as a portion of the subject-matter of which probable proof consists, had experienced, and which it was thus designed to redress, is but an exemplification of error more general and more deeply rooted. An insufficient apprehension and adoption of the *kind* of proof by which alone revelation can be established; an unwarranted resort to the doctrine of spiritual influence; pretences from this quarter or from within the mind to interfere with a proper intellectual application to the subject of the evidences; these also are the results of one and the same cause;

of the mental condition in which the inquiry into religious proof is undertaken, of an omitting to insist on the state of self-government and of intellectual ascendancy requisite to such investigation. To this source accordingly your attention in the first instance was directed. The question of sound intellectual religious conviction, not less than of maturing such conviction, when obtained, into the complex virtue of Christian faith, was seen to involve a trial; which reason and conscience, which the influences of the Holy Spirit rightly apprehended, duly applied for, and faithfully employed, will enable us to sustain; which we fall short of in proportion as the appointed means and instruments of conviction are interfered with or perverted. And interfered with and perverted they unavoidably must be, whenever from within the mind the subordinate qualities have disengaged themselves from a just controul; whenever, directly or otherwise, they are permitted to exert an influence beyond their proper province.

Now the several topics with which these discourses have thus been occupied, will be found comprehended in the sense of the text, when fully elicited; and the views I have taken of them will obtain a confirmation from the highest and most express authority.

And in the first place, the text regards the belief of a fact, of our Lord's return to life after crucifixion, after interment, after the greatest imaginable care taken to ascertain the separation of soul and body. Now, for a fact, sensible evidence or testi-

mony would in every case be requisite; and our Lord pronounces no further upon the *kinds* of proof, than to exclude from a *particular blessedness* belief on evidence of sense. Adequate grounds, though they be not sensible, are still supposed; nor is it the design of our Redeemer to hold out reward or encouragement to those, who should content themselves with less than sufficient evidence of truths of so practical a character and of such extensive interest. If then it be asked, why the acknowledgment of our Lord by Thomas, when at length sensible evidence was afforded him, is undervalued in comparison with the faith of those who should be removed by time or local distance from the age or scene of similar attestations, why an actual blessing was pronounced on the acceptance of one sort of satisfactory evidence rather than another, the answer, as supplied by the tenor of these discourses, and confirmed by our Lord's decision in the text, will in the first place be, that *it is our duty to accept and make the utmost of the kind of religious proof afforded*, be it what it may; that Thomas is therefore to a certain degree reprehended, in that he did not primarily acquiesce in the evidence of testimony. If subsequently we find him indulged with sensible proof, it was in consideration that Christianity as yet remained to be authenticated; that Thomas was of the number of those who amid persecution were to bear witness of a great doctrinal fact to others, of that which they had not merely "*heard*[a]," but "which they had seen with their "eyes, which they had looked upon, and their hands

[a] 1 John i. 1.

" had handled of the Word of life." The absence, in the first instance, of the evidence fully requisite to this apostle for such a purpose, was doubtless appointed, in order to " the more confirmation of the " faith[b]," and he in consequence was permitted, though not altogether without his own fault, to be doubtful; an additional and marked attestation was thus afforded to the fact of our Lord's re-appearance upon earth in his human body. Secondly, from this incident our Lord, as is usual with him, takes occasion to advance a general proposition. The incredulity of Thomas, under the particular circumstance of his apostleship, it had been seen fit to dissipate by sensible testimony; but removed as the greater part of mankind must be from evidence of this description, they are not authorized, and in a right understanding of the case, have not an interest to desire it. A blessing which cannot be afforded to this easier and readier method of conviction, will belong to such as arises from a patient persevering application to proof not pressing on the senses; to the sustaining and coming forth a believer out of the greater moral trial to which probable proof exposes both the heart and understanding. A just expectation may in such case be entertained of a reward proportioned to the manner in which the trial is supported, to the degree of resistance made to the facilities which probable proof presents for evading the proper force of religious evidence.

It is true, the advantage which at this period of Christianity we enjoy, of comprehending in our views

[b] Collect for St. Thomas's day.

the whole series of revelation from the first communications of God to Adam, and the particulars of proof which the early success of Christianity, which the primary religious and moral influence of its doctrines, and the completions of prophecy supply, of scrutinizing into the various evidences of our faith, discerning the appropriateness of their character to the truths they establish, their mutual relations, and their harmony, compensate abundantly, not indeed to the fancy, but to the intellect, for the absence of sensible proof: but then all are not duly aware of the proper moral character which lies at the bottom of religious evidence, and of which appeals to the senses comparatively are destitute; or being aware, they do not in fact regard it. Something immediate, something which presses more or less upon the senses, which dazzles the imagination, which agitates the feelings, cannot, even when so stayed and sober a question as that of religious belief is concerned, be altogether dispensed with. There are those who believe only in virtue of such excitement; and what they do not find, they create by visionary conceits; by a systematic erection of sentiment, of will[c], of some lesser quality of the mind, into the instrument of belief, or by unhallowed pretences[d] to divine communications. Stronger minds attach themselves to demonstrative[e] proof, and seek in the resources of their own reasoning powers the means of arriving at a *kind* of conclusion in regard to primary truths, to which the premises do not properly conduct them. Now all these errors stand

[c] See the second Sermon.

[d] See the third and fourth Sermons.

[e] See Sermon V. sub init.

condemned by the text, inasmuch as they imply an unwillingness to abide by the *species* of proof afforded, and to submit to the peculiar moral trial which this sort of evidence involves. Even where the kind of evidence on which revelation rests is acquiesced in and employed, men allow themselves, in *the conduct of the proof*, the yet greater liberties to which it in effect lies open. Some, averse from any application of natural and moral truth to revelation, would confine the subject-matter of its proof to what is *positive*, to those attestations which in the first instance were sensible, and which are brought home to others by human testimony. They would understand our Lord in the text exclusively to recommend that branch of evidence which had primarily but unavailingly been employed for the conviction of Thomas, namely, conviction on the testimony, verbal or written, of those who had been eye-witnesses; regardless of the proper compass of probable proof, and of the force which arises to it from the consistence, the convergence, the coherence, the essential relations of its branches and particulars. In another class of believers the same spirit of partiality takes a different direction; and the evidences of revelation are so contemplated, as though our Lord in the text, or elsewhere, had pronounced a blessing on belief which should rest exclusively on natural and moral grounds; on grounds independent, both directly and otherwise, of the evidence of sense. Now, to keep clear of these and other similar temptations to error, to see the nature and force of probable proof, and to appreciate and accept the moral trial which is involved in it; neither to regard an inquiry into religious evidence as

an occasion of remitting the proper use of the understanding, which revelation in no case, and least of all in the instance of its proof, requires; nor as an opportunity of introducing our own caprices and feelings in aid or in substitution of due intellectual application; nor again, to allow even *intellectual* pretences to divert us from the *species* of proof, to which the understanding should be exclusively directed and confined; further, not to imagine ourselves at liberty to narrow the grounds of religious belief, to withdraw from the body of the evidences the branch or the particulars of proof which happen to have least attraction for us, or in which we least are conversant, diligently and impartially to collect, accurately to arrange, and faithfully to employ whatever materials of evidence are within our reach; this supposes a proper order of the mind and supremacy of intellect and conscience already established. Well therefore might our Lord determine the condition of those persons to be "blessed," who manifest the signs of this happy internal government; who shew that they have come safely forth from this complex trial; who are able to discard whatever would stand in the way of the full and free admission, the adequate and impartial treatment of probable proof, of the less obvious but equally satisfactory evidence by which, in ordinary times and circumstances, revelation approves itself to fair inquiry.

Now from the subject of the evidences, as thus contemplated through the medium of the reception which the human mind may give to them, certain ultimate conclusions are deducible, which though

they will already have presented themselves to many before whom I speak, may advantageously be pressed on the attention of the less experienced part even of a well instructed auditory; specifically on those whose office it will hereafter be to manifest the comprehensive and correct, the intelligent and conscientious character of their own religious faith, in the methods they shall take to instil a suitable belief into the minds of others.

Before however I proceed to this final trespass on the patient attention with which these sermons have been heard, that attention is for a few moments invited to a point already touched upon in my introductory discourse, but which has purposely been kept detached from the general subject of the evidences, as having in effect only an incidental bearing on the truth of revelation. It is as supplying that groundwork for *natural theology* from the *material* world, which spiritual existence, or our mental constitution, furnishes from the moral, that physics acquire in a religious view their main importance. Still various details of agreement between the written volume of revealed truth and the phenomena of creation, between geology in particular and the Mosaic history, are reasonably to be expected, and may justly claim a certain proportion of attention. The establishment of an accordance between these documents will serve to repel objections, and may even supply a positive evidence on behalf of the inspired narrative of Moses; evidence of which, though it be not absolutely needed, we are not at liberty to neglect the search; which we may not disregard when found.

Now there is no one remark more deserving of attention in this view than the following; that the burthen of the difficulties which occur is usually laid in the wrong place, on the Scriptures, and not on the physical theory; whereas the latitude for which there is plainly room in respect of this last, is by no means equally admissible in regard to the volume of revelation. There is not so close a connection between natural phenomena and the systems formed on them, as between the text of Scripture and its interpretation. The ascertaining it is far more difficult in the former case; nor is there equal ground of assurance in any given instance, that the conclusions drawn in fact are valid. Notwithstanding the succinctness[f] of the Mosaic history, a just suspicion would attach to attempts to qualify or explain away the proper grammatical sense of its text; to any modifications of a meaning apparently distinct and definite, and which are not dictated by the passage itself, but by a supposed necessity of obtaining an agreement with some physical theory already embraced. Where indeed the terms and phrases of Scripture are less exact, a novel sense might not unfitly be borrowed from well ascertained discoveries

[f] David Le Clerc, Quæst. Sacr. p. 169. has well expressed himself on this head. "Scriptor divinus brevissimum tantum histo-
"riæ compendium tradit, unde necessario nascuntur multæ diffi-
"cultates, quæ, si fusior esset narratio, nullæ essent. Hinc vi-
"dentur oriri pleræque difficultates historicæ Scripturæ, quia
"dum res tam breviter perstringuntur, necesse est multa equivoca
"esse, multa taceri sine quibus alia satis intelligi nequeunt; multa
"videri contraria, varios denique oboriri legentium animis scrupu-
"los, qui nequeunt eximi nisi accuratiori narratione, quæ cum nobis
"desit, nulla spes est ista unquam posse solvi."

in physics; but for this latitude, for the supposition of a mode of expression which literally taken would be at variance with the facts of science, there would seem to be no place in respect of such main occurrences, as are properly connected with religious doctrine. Of a popular interpretation of Scripture in the sense of its being adapted to *vulgar prejudices*, there ought not to be a question; and in respect of the principal religious facts of the Mosaic history, an interpretation in conformity to *sensible appearances*, such as might be in itself admissible, seems hardly needed. The text of the Mosaic history, which has all the marks of a plain and simple narrative, should be left to express its obvious and literal meaning. No record could suffice for the various theories with which that history has successively been forced into agreement, unless its language were so indefinite as to have a proper agreement with none. So long as the sacred text is assumed to be the object on which experiments may be made, so long as it is subjected to the several varieties of interpretation which each physical system in its turn requires, there remains no one fixed point on which a satisfactory reconcilement can turn.

Next, when speculation has been confined to the natural phenomena, as to those with which alone it can be fitly occupied, the fate of successive theories is of a nature to inspire pertinent grounds of caution to the theologian and the geologist.

1. Are our physical data sufficient to enable us to distinguish much that was indisputably miraculous at the outset, much that was precipitated perhaps

beyond what in the ordinary course of nature would have been evolved, to distinguish a proper creation, and the primary forms and original adaptations of matter to its uses, from the established order of Providence, by which what had been created and adapted was thenceforward maintained and governed?

2. Next and even under the ordinary natural government of God, is the length of time which theories assign for the production of certain effects incontestably necessary?

3. Be it that we have not with unwashed hands proceeded to force the sacred text into accordance with our own conceptions, yet have we taken the requisite pains for ascertaining, that there is no admissible modification of a received hypothesis which would bring it nearer to the proper sense of Scripture, than what we are now proposing?

4. Is the observation of phenomena by which facts have been obtained sufficiently long and repeated, the sphere of observation duly extended; are our generalizations by consequence neither partial nor hasty; are our theories, and the rules which we have laid down for our absolute guidance in these inquiries, so many immediate deductions from well established premises, and do they *fully* warrant the conclusions we have drawn from them?

Here, not less than in respect of the other points of connection between natural and religious truth antecedently treated of, much depends on the previous moral condition of the inquirer, especially if

that inquirer be a youthful one; for there will always be danger in such case of a leaning to novelty, a readiness to be captivated by the plausibilities of theory, rather than to be bound down by the definite letter and authority of a written volume. Those even of greater experience, to whom researches of this description may prove a relaxation from severer studies, are not unsuitably reminded, that our general reliance on the evidences of religion cannot rationally be suspended by the circumstance of such inquiries, or be affected by their issue. We otherwise "know in whom we have believed:" the claims of the Pentateuch in particular are on the authority of our Lord and his Apostles incontrovertibly established; the connection of the books of Moses with the subject-matter of Christianity is essential; the creation and the deluge [g] are points of express reference in the New Testament; and the subordinate difficulty of a consonant interpretation of the volumes of nature and of grace might still subsist without any proper injury to our faith. Such a result however, in regard to any point of magnitude, would be improbable beforehand, and is in fact not to be apprehended. No real discovery is found to militate against the Mosaic account; much, in so far as geological conclusions have been established, to fortify it. Various phenomena are conceivable of which the solution, in consistency with the religious facts of that history, would be impracticable; but no such point has been substantiated. If therefore I here forbear to enter into the details of this connection,

[g] The *creation*, Coloss. i. 16. where see Whitby's note. Heb. xi. 3. The 4th of Romans, verse 17, does not apply to this subject. See also Amos v. 8. The *deluge*, Heb. xi. 7. 2 Pet. iii. 7.

it is not that I augur less favourably than others of the success of the inquiries which are now pursuing; it is because I would retain them in their proper subjection to the only principles which can ensure to them a just success. These principles must of course be independent of particular theories, so as to apply to the state whatever it at any given time may be of physical science, and to the actual position in which it is supposed to stand with reference to the text of Scripture. Even those who are employed on such speculations, in proportion as their views are correct and discriminative, will themselves desire, on behalf of the result of their inquiries, the test of time and observation; precipitate conclusions have on these very topics proved the bane alike of religion and of science.

And now, to give a definite conclusion to what in these discourses has been advanced, that the subject of which I have treated is *important* will readily be granted; and I might well be contented to incur the imputation of want of judgment in its selection, so the recurrence to it in the particular views here taken were not likewise *seasonable*.

If in these discourses, and for the purpose of discrimination, it has been found necessary to contemplate the branches of probable proof apart, yet let it be remembered that they are so many portions of an evidence which harmoniously unites on behalf of Christianity; and it is only when injudicious attempts are made to set them in array against each other, that the degrees of their respective force, and the order which essentially belongs to them, require to

be dwelt upon. Both the method of religious proof and its subject-matter suffer essentially by such disjunction; and in an enlarged and most important application of a Scripture phrase, the enemies of natural religion and the intemperate assertors of its claims, may fitly be admonished, that the natural and revealed dispensations of the Deity be not by them "put asunder." The positive proofs attest that to have occurred, which natural and moral considerations bring home to the human mind in the way most congenial to its character; and faith in revelation has a twofold reference to positive and to moral, to mutually related, but distinct groundworks. Faith or belief on the ground of reasoning concurs with faith in the authority of Him who reveals, and both are embraced by the evidence for revelation.

Nor let an inquirer into the general subject of the evidences be disconcerted on perceiving that the argument from effect to cause, on which natural religion specifically relies, or that synthetic reasoning, even in the subordinate and qualified employment of it on the same truths, has often been impugned; for what mode or what materials of proof, what truth or what principle is there, which, on a reference to religious or to moral, to physical or even to mathematical knowledge, will not appear to have been denied by some one? And what degree of religious proof would at length be left us, if, while one party claim the liberty of depreciating the positive, and another the natural and moral contributions, each in its turn were to be given up, to such pretensions? Out of this very circumstance arises an increased occasion on our parts for distinct and defi-

nite views; a duty of not accepting or rejecting in the mass; of bringing to the test our intellectual and moral qualities by enlisting them in the service of diligent investigation; of not addressing ourselves to inquiry, as though it depended on us, amid the vanity of theorising, to give to truth or to withhold from it an existence and a character. If of the proofs of natural religion, and of the contributions which, when itself substantiated, this system affords to the cause of revelation, some altogether refuse to hear; if by others the evidence derived from this single quarter is deemed all sufficient, it is not therefore to be yielded up, or to be exclusively insisted on, as the temper of the times or of individuals may dictate; since neither of these extremes can be acquiesced in, without shaking the very foundations of our religious security. If our views of the evidences be partial, our faith will bear throughout the same character; nor is this all; no branch of proof can be detracted from without involving a proportionate injury to every other department of the evidences. The nature and extent indeed of the mischief which advocates of revelation are producing by their partialities and predilections may not be perceptible to themselves; but they are in fact converting to the injury of revelation the very circumstances in which consists the specific character of its evidences, namely, that they are an aggregate of independent branches and particulars, whose strength resides in *combination;* and that it is the specific object of these evidences to constitute, both in respect of the understanding and of the other mental qualities, a *trial.* And as there is no branch or subdivision or particular of such evidence which can properly be spared,

so is there none respecting which doubts may not be raised, and the possible side of a question be opposed to the probable; none which, if fancy or inclination be allowed to dictate, we may not on plausible grounds persuade ourselves and others to reject. But then in thus bringing into play the opportunities for objection, for partial exhibition, for capricious exaltation and depression of evidence, which probable proof presents, we shall ultimately find we have been too hard only for ourselves; that we have applied to religious proof a test by which it professes not to abide; that we have overlooked the condition of our own hearts and understandings, which it was one specific object of such proof to give us the means of ascertaining. With a view to the prevention of these dangerous errors, it is important not to soften down, or to disguise from the youthful mind, the proper character of probable proof; but to urge this character as the suitable motive to the adequate and impartial entertainment of religious evidence. On such minds it should habitually be impressed, that this evidence is not of a nature to supply the defect of the moral action which is required from themselves; that to cursory examination it will hardly yield conviction at all; while yet the nature of the truths to be made out exacts, that they be proceeded upon with as much decision as though they had been the result of sensible evidence or demonstration; that hence the necessity to a due reception and treatment of the *kind* of evidence afforded of the continual reference, which in these discourses has been maintained to a *moral condition of the mind;* not because we are called upon in any degree to supply by senti-

ment, by will, or even by intellectual effort, evidence in itself defective; nor yet merely on account of the affinity of that mental condition to the character of the subject-matter to be believed; but because such a mental state is the requisite preparation for a *thorough* and impartial investigation of the evidence by which that belief is to be induced, such as the nature of probable proof demands, and a moral trial supposes. Then how should minds in other respects cultivated attain sufficiently and upon system to such a mental condition, but through a MORAL TRAINING?

And first, in regard to the *mental condition* required, this is not here contemplated solely as it shews itself in keeping the *conduct* free from positive and wilful offence, (although the reaction from acts and habits to the mind is considerable, and "the holy Spirit of discipline will not abide when un-" righteousness cometh in[h],") but further is meant, as we have seen, the securing the understanding from all such disturbance on the part of the will and affections, as may narrow and pervert it; preoccupy it with partialities, cloud its perceptions of truth, hinder it from following up its convictions into their consequences, precipitate it into extremes on either side. Now it is a peculiar advantage accruing to those designed for the sacred ministry, and which they cannot too highly estimate, that the nature of the subjects to which their attention is habitually directed, the ends proposed by their specific studies, tend to enforce the subjection of the lesser

[h] Wisdom i. 5.

qualities of the mind, and by consequence to ensure that proper mental government, which a due application to the evidences requires: but then this tendency is not so absolute and exclusive but that the proper interest which the sentiments and affections possess in the circumstance of revelation being true, may still incline the mind to defer too much to them; to anticipate the results of intellectual inquiry, to forego the labour of it, to take up with mere moral suasion, or to suppose the proper mental industry superseded by the influences of the Spirit. Belief meanwhile is in our power, but not on any such grounds as these; not because dependent on arbitrary will, on sentiment, or on any cause exclusive of proofs sufficient to satisfy an unbiased understanding. This position receives the requisite illustration from the two considerations already insisted on; namely, the character of probable proof, and the moral order of the mind requisite to its due appreciation and employment. For while religious evidence does not so far press upon the understanding as does sense or even demonstration, and while the Holy Spirit does not controul, the moral preparation for that correct and adequate discharge of the intellectual functions, on which conviction turns, and the means by which the requisite divine graces may be obtained, are within our reach. With ourselves properly rests the question, whether we will resort to those means of internal government in the first instance, and then of intellectual application to the species and the particulars of proof afforded, which cannot fail, under the divine blessing, to terminate in a sound conviction.

Still however we are not arrived at the ultimate

security for a due inquiry into religious evidence. If in proportion as the mental faculties are dormant, religious proof must be without its proper hold on them, so when from whatever cause the powers of the mind have been exerted, a MORAL TRAINING becomes indispensable to give them a due exercise and direction. This training therefore should begin at an early period of education, at a time of life when the mind can afford to be detained amid elementary truths, and is also most apt for them. Without actual experience and observation of our mental capacities, as exercised on the primary moral truths which those capacities (when themselves considered as a subject and as parts of the creation) especially contribute to supply; without an intimate and habitual acquaintance with such truths, our notions of revelation will be inadequate, will not be the more, but the less exact and appropriate. Doubts will assail us in regard to the foundations of our faith, against which we shall, humanly speaking, have an imperfect refuge; nor shall we be able to apprehend distinctly in what consists the proper order of the mind, or what are those relations between its faculties, which a due reception of religious evidence supposes. Even in the discussion of the doctrinal truths of revelation, much of the confusion prevalent in certain minds would be dissipated by what our mental constitution tells us; points being often insisted on in a sense, or to an extent, which the proper character of our faculties would be seen expressly to exclude. Such a training can be opposed upon system only by the denial of a proper connection of moral truth (considered as an independent system) with the nature

on the one hand, whence it in effect derives, and on the other with revelation; by the refusing to such truth any other foundation than the positive communications of the Deity. Those who maintain such propositions must in the first place detect some fallacy in that course of probable reasoning, by which such primary verities as revelation itself supposes to be fundamental, to which it gives a more definite character, and a more extensive application, are deduced from the creation generally, and from our mental constitution; or they must disprove the uniform tendencies of the human mind to elicit the moral distinctions, and of conscience to apply them. Next, they will have to explain how profane antiquity arrived at so much of moral and religious truth, as undeniably they were possessed of; at a degree of it for which tradition does not suffice to account, and which cannot, without the greatest violation of probability, be ascribed to the Jewish Scriptures; how it happened, further, that truth of this description had the effect of conducting, upon distinct and independent grounds, those who most employed their reason in respect of it, to the very threshold of revelation. Lastly, they must contend against the sound interpretation of those very Communications of the Deity, within whose positive character they would confine the truth in question. For holy writ supposes the human mind to be capable of ascending, in the absence of express revelation, from the creation to an acknowledgment of certain moral and religious truths, and imputes blame to the heathen on this specific account, that when they had through that channel attained to a perception of these truths, they abused it. Holy writ plainly re-

quires us to distinguish with St. Paul the state which the heathen were by nature placed in, and the progress which the apostle declares them to have made in religious and in ethical truth, from the corruptions and abuses of which they wilfully were the authors; from the defective practice, the unrighteous lives, the incommunicative spirit, amid which they "held" or maintained the truths they had acquired. Though all that Gentile or even Jew could learn or practise was not of a nature to supersede the specific need of Christianity, would, on the contrary, but the more lay open to view the particulars of that necessity; though it is the object of the apostle to assert and to illustrate this, yet is the proper existence of Gentilism, of certain truths independently obtained by reason, implied in this exhibition of its failures; yet does the apostle distinctly declare, that degrees of natural light the heathen had, which they might have turned to better account than actually they did, which they were "inexcusable" for not so employing. Nor shall *we*, to whom express revelation is supplied, a revelation in respect of which Judaism itself is but as a shadow, nor shall *we* be in our turn excused, if we avail not ourselves of whatever assistance those introductory dispensations, however imperfect, may be capable of affording, towards the proof of the revelation in which they severally have terminated.

But now there are those, who, though they venture not on the task of detaching natural and moral truths from their proper foundations, or from their appointed objects and relations, would yet confine this moral training to the earlier periods of life.

Against primary exercises of such a character, against classical learning, as one of its main instruments, no objection is advanced; but when the mind is at length becoming capable of an effectual application of its attainments, then this acquaintance with profane antiquity, on the part of those especially who are designed for the service of the ministry, should, it is assumed, be altogether discarded. But if the connection of natural and moral truths with revelation be real, can any period justly be assigned for relinquishing a course of study which maintains the influence of those truths upon the mind, instructs it still more and more in their character and application? Shall that period above all be chosen, when the youthful mind now at length discerns the wisdom which has dictated its early initiation into such truths; when it perceives the importance, whether for the defence of our faith, or for an enlightened apprehension and self-application of it, of those foundations of moral truth deposited in their minds, and gradually built upon; when it finds itself thus possessed of a security for just and comprehensive views of the dispensations of the Deity, of their truths and evidences, and specifically of those of revelation?

But a yet lower though equally untenable ground is sometimes taken. Admit the independent existence and the utility of such truths in reference to revelation, yet are they not too much rested in? and have they not a tendency to inflate the mind, and to divert it from those more humble and more appropriate views of the capacities and attainments of a fallen nature, which revelation would inspire, and

which the sacred volume specifically inculcates? Now such abuses exist; but does this lapsed nature, when honestly consulted, itself supply no corrective? It is when we have arrived at the point whence alone extensive views can be indulged, have experimentally ascertained the measure of our capacities, and have acquired this knowledge through the failure of its aims in some instances, through the success of them in others; (through success which shews how much remains to be acquired, through failures which satisfy us how far we must ever be from the complete attainment of it,) that we discern solid grounds of humility, even in respect of our progress in natural and moral truth; that we discover the introductory character of such truth in respect of revelation; that we are in a situation intelligently to bring our talents and our acquisitions to the foot of the Cross; to devote our well exercised energies and a duly attempered ambition to that service; to perceive and to admit that human learning derives its highest pretension to regard, and natural and moral truths an especial claim to distinction, from their capacity of contributing to the proof and illustration of truths revealed. The mind thus initiated into truth, as positively communicated, will best be disposed to accept the lessons and the example of humility which are there exhibited.

But why do I still detain your attention on a subject, which in this hallowed seat of reason and learning and religion is already understood and appreciated? Because in conclusion I would fortify the principles on which these discourses have been constructed, by the exemplifications of them which

here abound. In this view, even the present attempt may go forth into less favoured quarters, and convey, however inadequately, the impression, that here the rising generation is trained and practised in so comprehensive and substantial a course of instruction, as "in understanding to become men," as to be enabled to give "a reason of their Christian "hope;" that while neither exact nor experimental science remains without a proportionate regard, those parts of knowledge, and that specific *instrument*[1] of procuring it, which best prepare for revelation, and for the *species* of proof by which belief is to be determined, are especially cultivated. With a view to this ultimate result, reasoning and ethical science will have been directed to the production of that happiest feature of all preparatory discipline, a moral condition of the mind. The moral training by which such condition has been induced will have quickened the natural operations of conscience; supplied it with clearer views of its primary rule; and rendered evident to the mind the nature and consequences of its own determinations, and of the conduct in which they issue; will have imprinted on the understanding the natural and essential connection of virtue and happiness; will have rendered intelligible the necessity which revelation inculcates of acts and habits of virtue, and of Gospel holiness, to the well-being of an intellectual and moral, though lapsed creature. Nor does this ethical training only ensure the mental order; it strengthens in a yet further sense the human mind;

[1] *Dialectics* as connected with *probable* proof.

it gives vigour and confidence to the understanding itself; increases the exertions and the efficiency of this faculty; raises its operations to a higher level than they could have attained without a moral impulse and a moral character. Lastly, the same training cultivates, sustains, renders discriminative and available, that love of truth which must lie at the foundation of all successful pursuit of learning; which must direct the application of it when attained; and which conducts specifically to revelation. Where these ulterior effects have been induced upon the mental order, where this order itself is fully established on which the proofs of revelation, even when they have been suitably presented to the mind, must still depend for their reception, the other qualities subserve the purposes of the understanding without interrupting its specific functions; superadd to religious belief the conformity of the will, the persuasions of the heart, and surround it with those decent ornaments, which it belongs only to the imagination when purified by moral culture to supply. Nor is there any one of the various powers or affections with which a beneficent Deity has endowed our nature, or of the acquirements, scientific or literary, on which they may be occupied, that will not in its proper place and order contribute something to the consolidating of A FAITH, which embraces the works and the will of the great and common Author.

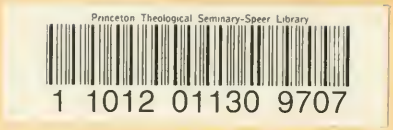
Here therefore, should fanaticism, which in one century paved the way for infidelity, and in another was leagued with it, once more assail the natural and moral foundations of revealed truth, to which

as correctly apprehended they both are hostile; here may the stand be most appropriately made on behalf of the reason and religion of the community; since hence the proper implements of defence may in the fullest measure be supplied, and since fatal indeed would be the result, if *here* that bane of truth and morals should be permitted to intrude itself. With weapons of the temper which belongs to this armoury, we may with good assurance of success *go actively forth* in the defence of the same foundations; for though in the natural world "after day cometh "night," yet error[k] "shall not prevail against wis- "dom."

Or, if Providence, measuring its gifts by our deserts, rather than as hitherto by its own spontaneous mercies, should abate for a time of its wonted protection, and true religion, which then only can exhibit the proper comprehensiveness of her character, develope the extent of her relations with reason and with morals, with science and with learning, with our civil and our social interests, when established, when encouraged in a degree proportioned to the beneficent influence with which she is able to repay the support afforded her, should be compelled to flee before the combination of the common enemies of herself and them, yet will she linger to the utmost amid these abodes which she so long has loved, and whence the supports of reason, of learning, of natural and moral truth, have been largely derived to

[k] Wisdom vii. 30. "*Vice* shall not prevail, &c." synonymous here with *error*.

her; here, if it may be, will concentrate herself amid the appointed human securities for her truths and evidences; here will leave the latest traces of her footsteps.


Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01130 9707